3. A critical reading from cases and emerging issues

3.1 Transversal reading of cases

The previous chapter offered a plethora of social farming examples. Although they all share some characteristics (small-scale activities, initiatives that are driven by an intrinsic motivation rather than mere economic stimuli, and so on), at times they are very diverse. Although the individual cases obviously offered interesting reading, their diversity offers ample opportunity for an enriching transversal analysis as will be outlined in this chapter.

Social Farming initiatives across Europe are characterised by diversity in terms of their stages and trajectories of development; their focus; their organisational structure; their scale of operation and their regulatory environment – among other features.

Due to historical evolution and political choices, the institutional environment represents a gradient ranging from a well-structured and controlled environment, often large-scale and institutionally driven, to more ad-hoc, small-scale initiatives. Also the expectations about the role of the institutional environment differs: in some cases (not necessarily contained within regional borders) stakeholders want more regulation and structure; in other cases, the stakeholders want to remain or become more independent as they fear over-regulation or a deterioration in the quality of the service.

The diversity is also apparent in the economic returns from the social farming activity. For some farmers, the care activity is part of a strict business plan and needs sufficient return on investment to be continued. For instance, some farmers in the Netherlands create a high economic return. For others, the economic effect of their care activity is of minor importance or even non-existent. Il Forteto in Italy is a case in point.

The former point about the expectations vis-à-vis economic return, is related to another factor that creates diversity within the
social farm sector in Europe. The intrinsic motivation to offer care on a farm is extremely diverse. An encompassing Christian ideology in Italy; a care farm in which a biodynamic cosmology in care is central; a therapeutic-centered and meaningful activity approach by the Brothers of Charity; a mere entrepreneur for whom social farming is but another economic opportunity – these are but a few examples of ideologies and motivations that eventually result in the establishment of care activities on a farm.

This diversity leads to very different roles for agriculture within the whole realm of social farming. The role of agriculture or farming activities is not limited to mere production. While in some contexts, such as the farms offering social farming in Flanders, agriculture is mainly an economic activity, in other contexts agriculture is only a means to provide the environment in which users can receive care. Or sometime agricultural activities may just serve the purpose of sustaining a community. This range is often linked with the role played by therapeutic institutions, which vary from very being formalised and prescriptive, to non-existence or being seen as undesirable.

These diverse aspects are explored in the transversal reading of the cases that have been presented to date. Subsequently, we focus on the inclusive effects of social farming (3.2), on the relationship between social farming and landscape and environment (3.3), on gender aspects of social farming (3.4), on its economic features (3.5) and on the role of policies and institutions (3.6).

For many countries and regions involved, the SoFar project represented the first attempt to determine the nature and extent of social farming initiatives. Consequently, the availability and quality of supporting data to examine cross-cutting issues in social farming must be seen as a constraint on the analysis. For these reasons, the following discussion should be interpreted as exploratory and impressionistic – rather than definitive or conclusive, with the main purpose being to raise issues that warrant further examination.

### 3.2 Inclusive effects

Inclusion is about society changing to accommodate difference and to combat discrimination (Inclusive Development, 2008). The analysis of more than one hundred cases revealed that in all countries the service-users of social farming belong to quite dif-
ferent disadvantaged social groups: they have an intellectual disabil-

ty, they have issues with mental health, they have reduced

work capacities, they are stigmatised, they are marginalised by the

labour market etc. They are more or less excluded from mainstream

society because of their difference. Therefore, in term of inclusion

social farming has to be discussed from two angles:

• From the perspective of how the concept itself is integrated into

inclusive development;

• From the perspective of how it can contribute to inclusion of

service-users.

3.2.1 Social farming as an element of inclusive development

Good practices, highlighted through various case-studies,

proved that social farming is addressing key elements of inclusive

development.

The first and probably the most important is the intrinsic cul-

ture of collaboration, networking, listening and tolerance between

quite different stakeholder groups, such as people with special

needs, farmers, local communities, social/health care professionals,

policy-makers or administrators etc.

Secondly, social farming represents community-based and

community-oriented development approaches. In this way, it sup-

ports new paradigms in the field of rural development as well as in

the field of social care.

Thirdly, social farming corresponds to a human rights frame-

work through the provision of individualised and personalised

services based upon the social model of disability. Its special added

value is the possibility for a disadvantaged person to be integrated

into an environment where their personal potential may be valued

and enhanced.

Fourthly, social farming has the potential to further broaden,

diversify and add value to multifunctional agriculture. By interlacing

farming with welfare services, social farming creates new markets

for farmers, as well as an opportunity for the creation of market-

based policies in both sectors through the transformation of public

goods or positive externalities into private and semi-private goods.

The extent to which these qualities can be realised depends very

much on the realities of the relevant cultural, political and economic

environments. In spite of many commonly-accepted objectives, it is

problematic to create services with the active involvement of soci-

ety (Lamb & Bachrach, 2001; Brun & Rapp, 2001). The consequence
is that many disadvantaged groups in society lead an isolated life, where health professionals are the most important members of their social network (Dewees et al., 1996; Borge et al., 1999). Discussions at national and EU platforms within the SoFar project pointed to the different issues that hinder the development of social farming and suffocate its inclusive potential, such as the domination of a medical model of health over a social-psychological one, the domination of state-based social care over community-based ones and the unwillingness or incapacity of bureaucrats to overcome a sectoral approach to policy-making etc. Yet, social farming – although more or less still invisible and marginalised within mainstream society – provides all the evidence that change is possible.

### 3.2.2 Inclusion of service-users through social farming

The types of barriers faced by the service-users of social farming are attitudinal, political and linked to empowerment. Social farming is challenging all of these because the focus is on working together and performing the job that has to be done. Service-users say that they consider themselves as workers or farmers and not as patients or clients. Furthermore, its inclusion impact arises from the intervention that follows ideas of being (Depla, 2004): as ordinary as possible (belonging to the community), as meaningful as possible (fulfillment of wishes), as integrated as possible (connectedness) and as active as possible.

Society accepts and includes a person by tendering him/her an identity (Berger, 1995). Different societies have different attitudes towards people with special needs. Sometimes it is more and sometimes less benevolent according to actual socio-economic circumstances. Yet, social farming is a system that is user-oriented and based on high ethical standards and solidarity. Users are approached as so-called normal persons, accepted for their capabilities; they experience respect without prejudice. So, social farming presents a feasible scenario of transition from a medical to a social model of disability.

Furthermore, social farming takes place in the open (farms, gardens, parks). In this way it provides the possibility for the general public to learn about the real capabilities of people with special needs and to understand them better.

Activities that are provided by social farming are, in the majority of cases, oriented to day-care with productive and meaningful activities, as well as integration into the workforce and rehabilitation. But, at the same time, case studies indicate that social farming still depends heavily on public funding and that it is very often (in about one third of cases)
organised within the traditional institutional framework. This is why there is still a very heavy dependence by the service-users on the different kinds of institutions that define their choices. On the other hand, there are very many cases that are community-based and business-oriented social organisations (gardens, farms, enterprises, co-operatives, foundations). They illustrate how to practice de-institutionalisation, socialisation and inclusion successfully.

In each and every case of social farming, there is evidence of empowerment-oriented and strengths-based practices that reflect the changing paradigm in social and health care (Chapin & Opal-Cox, 2001). The users are listened to, consulted and involved. They are encouraged to make their own choices that help them increase their self-esteem and independence. Empowerment happens through social farming via better social interaction, more numerous and diversified social contacts and better social skills.

Social farming is attracting the attention of many professionals in the social/health care sector who see it as a new professional challenge; a new and valuable opportunity to gain more knowledge and understanding of service-users’ capabilities and as a means of implementing new working methods. While they have found social farming practices demanding in terms of organisation and economics, they find it rewarding in terms of creativity, sociability, spontaneity, flexibility and its relaxed atmosphere.

The professional challenge is to deepen professional knowledge regarding the implementation of new methods of working with service-users; better working conditions; room for creativity and higher levels of motivation at work in order to create an environment that leads to a life as ordinary, meaningful, integrated and active as possible.

### 3.3 Landscape and environment

The appearance of cultural landscapes in Europe is influenced strongly by agriculture (van der Ploeg et al., 2002). In former times, cultural landscapes were a by-product of an agriculture with lots of manual work, whereas today a diverse and aesthetic landscape is preserved and developed only by active decisions and means. Today only 3% of the European population is engaged in agriculture, creating the landscape for the rest of society. Landscape is a factor of production for farmers. But landscape is also a place for
living, working, home, experience, recreation, moving through and making connections.

The connectedness of nature and culture is a typical feature of European cultural landscapes. The conversion to environmentally friendly practices such as organic farming can be the starting point for higher levels of biodiversity. The realisation of this potential depends on whether the farmers recognise nature and landscape development as objectives of their farming styles and whether they succeed in integrating them into their agricultural practices.

Against the background of European Union agricultural reform, according to which the ecological achievements of farms are to be rewarded in the future, and at the same time, jobs on farms are to be created outside the sphere of agricultural production, there is a new potential to develop organic farming in a multifunctional manner. Such multifunctionality can mean combining the production of food with social functions, such as providing space for recreation, care of the landscape, and the provision of care for those with disabilities. (Lenhard et al., 1997, Kalisch & van Elsen, 2008).

Research suggests that the relationship people have with nature and landscape also forms their opinions about it and thus constitutes part of their identity. Loss of identity is one of the problems experienced by people with drug addiction and other marginalised groups in society (van Elsen et al., 2006). Could the approach of social farming also include care and therapy for nature and landscapes? Are there already examples of combining such aspects of multifunctionality? And, primarily, can multifunctionality play a role in enhancing a feeling of identity? Are social forms of agriculture destined to combine organic farming with nature conservation?

From a theoretical point of view landscape work on farms and people with disabilities can be synergetic. It provides plenty of varied manual work that can be combined with daily routine work – especially in winter or other times when there is not much agricultural work to do. The strong communities (like associations that include parents of service-users and other supporters) support the farms that are not so dependent on profit in comparison with ordinary family farms. Through integration of people with disabilities, the need to produce high yields is lower and the ability and the desire to care and protect people and the landscape higher. Landscape work can be used as an advertisement for the institution and to promote the farm. The philosophy of the community and identi-
The share of organic social farms might be an indicator for increased environmental and ethical awareness on social farms. The contribution of organic farming to the protection of species and the environment has been proven by many studies, so it seems worthwhile to compare the amount of organic care farms in the different countries. Within the SoFar project, the number of organic farms with social integration varies among the countries and does not give a consistent picture. Whereas in Germany about 60% of the social farms are certified organic, there are only 36 (40%) of 90 surveyed farms organic or low input in Ireland and 20 (13%) of 155 farms that are interested in social care work organic in Slovenia.

Although the database of each country differs, the results show that the share of organic farms among the social farms is much higher than the average number of organic farms in the countries. That leads to the conclusion that these farms contribute per se to a healthy environment, even if they do not offer special landscape activities.

Turning to landscape and conservation activities undertaken by social farms in participating countries in SoFar, in the Netherlands 90% of the care farms are actively improving their environment by nature conservation measurements and 25% of the care farms (compared to 11% other farms) get some additional income for these measures. Also in Flanders many care farms are actively improving their environment and do not see any obstructing factors to do so – besides missing time and financial support. Many social farms in Ireland include some kind of environmental education.

In Italy, the social co-operatives run landscape maintenance
groups and get supported by an Italian law that favours social enterprises when tendering for public contracts. These public orders are mostly simple and unsophisticated landscape maintenance measures in urban areas, rather than activities concerned with nature conservation or landscape development. Low profile landscape maintenance seems to be rather suited as an activity for employing underprivileged people because the staff do not need much training, land ownership is not an issue and the income can be acquired without high costs or expensive instruments. At least some examples in Germany show that there is a threat when social entrepreneurs have to compete with landscape maintenance businesses.

Activities like mowing grass and caring for green space can be seen as a step towards other landscape activities to preserve and develop the biodiversity and biotopes within European cultural landscapes. Social farming has the potential to combine therapeutic goals, the employment of people and social activities to support nature. The awareness for this challenge within social farming should be enhanced.

An example of the synergy between social agriculture and the development of the natural surroundings is provided by Surcenord Farm (see text box).

**Surcenord Farm**

Surcenord Farm is an organic grassland farm in France founded in 1978 which keeps cattle and forms part of a remedial educational institution with several residential homes and workshops. Fifteen young people with learning disabilities aged between 15 and 27 receive instruction and therapy (riding, art therapy), work on the farm and undertake domestic duties. The two farmers place the land and the farm facilities at the disposal of the instructor and carers. Some seven or eight young people at a time, always accompanied by educators, are involved in the farm work which mainly comprises work in the cattle sheds, harvesting fodder, woodland management and landscape care as well as the maintenance of fences and traditional irrigation systems.

The farm is situated on about 100 ha of largely sloping land at 850-1140 m altitude in the Vosges (cf. Köppl & van Elsen 2005). It is managed as pasture and mowed for forage. The livestock comprises 25 cows and calves, about 20 beef cattle, 10 heifers and 10 horses. The products sold are meat, wood and woodchips. In 2004, the subsidies, which include state support for integration of the people with disabilities, comprised 44% of turnover.
The management of Surcenord Farm are working to open up the landscape, part of which has become scrubby with broom, by planned clearing. Farmer André Frommelt stressed that they are not trying to revert to the ‘monotony’ of the bare hillsides that were there at the end of the 19th century but rather they value a ‘diversity of habitats’ on the land they manage and strive to ‘maintain and further develop’ them. During tree-felling, individual pines, firs, rowans, junipers, dogrose and whitebeam are preserved. The tree stumps are left in the ground and eventually rot away. The fellings are used in the woodchip central-heating system which meets all the heating and hot water requirements of the living accommodation and the farm buildings, using some 3,000 cubic metres of fuel annually.

Farmer André Frommelt sees himself as ‘more a student of nature than an environmentalist’. He is a member of several naturalist associations, is an amateur botanist and frequently devotes himself to the observation of wild animals. The cautious further opening of the landscape while maintaining a mosaic of open spaces, woodland margins, bushes and individual trees is intended to meet the requirements of, for example, red-backed shrikes and capercaillies. To protect whinchats, certain areas are used only after their nesting season. A sloping bog, which is subject to nature conservation status, is used particularly extensively and parts of it are fenced off to protect the coralroot orchid (*Corallorhiza trifida*), an endangered species. At the same site, André Frommelt would like to try to re-establish *Bruchia vogesiaca*, a species of moss that was discovered in the Vosges but has disappeared. In recent years there has been a close collaboration with the Ballons National Park in the Vosges. Partly at the instigation of the farmers, the Park has commissioned various studies on botanical and entomological questions and these in turn have yielded information on management for the farmers.

The farmers are looking for opportunities to make a wider circle of people aware of ecological issues. Furthermore there is interest in ‘stronger and more regular scientific guidance’ directed towards concerns about species conservation. A medium-term plan for the farm is the construction of a solar-heating system for hot water and the installation of an ecological system for treating their own sewage. As regards education, they are considering employing adult carers to help with setting up a meat and milk processing unit.

To summarise the multifunctionality perspective of the care farm approach: Care farms “use” nature as a tool to “heal” or to
employ people with disabilities; they use “natural processes” (such as animal-human interactions, natural rhythms in horticulture). Moreover, care farms can also contribute to the care of healthy nature and landscapes by additional manpower (service-users) and less economic pressure (additional income). That makes social farming a “win-win” situation, integrating functions such as caring for people with disabilities and contributing to the development of rural landscapes.

Landscape care needs many helping hands. Social farming allows the use of hedgerows for dietary fodder and it allows extensive care for biotopes and provides experiences for children on school farms. Green care in agriculture or “social farming” might lead to new perspectives for healthy agriculture, healthy people and healthy landscapes in Europe. This makes social farming an important step towards healthy people and healthy landscapes.

3.4 Gender issues

As noted previously, Social Farming crosses many sectoral boundaries – but clearly agriculture and social care are central concerns. In both of these arenas, the analysis of gender issues is the basis of a wide-ranging body of academic and policy literature. Recurring themes include the feminisation of the care-sector workforce; gender equality in the community and voluntary sector; the invisibility of care labour (both paid and unpaid) and the commodification of care (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2004; Daly & Rake, 2003; European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions, 2006; Ungerson, 1997). Regarding agriculture specifically, a variety of gender equality issues arise in relation to professional status; recognition; visibility and contribution to the sector (European Commission, 2002).

Notwithstanding the caveat on the quality of data emerging from the SoFar investigations due to its explorative and limited character, we can nonetheless provide some insights into some gender-related issues highlighted above – from a social farming perspective. Regarding the feminisation of care work, Daly and Rake (2003) argue that this is not the case only within the family/domestic sphere, but is also reflected in paid care work. As the sector has grown, women have formed an ever-larger majority of paid
care workers. Insights from various dimensions of the SoFar work (i.e. information contained in the national/regional State of the Art reports; national/regional case studies; national/regional/EU-level platforms addressed – all of which are addressed in Chapters 1, 2 and 4 respectively of this volume) provide some support for this contention – but it is not uniform across all regions/countries studied. For example, in the case of Italy, the “typical” worker in agricultural social co-operatives is described as “young, female and qualified” and it is estimated that women account for approximately 70% of the workforce in this sector. In Slovenia, the State of the Art report noted that on approximately 70% of Care Farms, it is women who take responsibility for the service users. In the Netherlands, the high proportion of females among volunteer workers in social farming was noteworthy. In some instances (Germany, Flanders), where social farming activities were differentiated between those that were strongly “agricultural-based” and those which were “care-based”, female staff were more likely to be assigned to the latter category of work.

It appears that women are highly visible and perhaps “over-represented” among the rank-and-file workforce in many social farming initiatives. The extent to which this visibility and level of participation is mirrored in other related arenas – such as networking, advocacy, engagement with policy makers etc. – is an important issue, particularly given the stated objectives of the SoFar project. These include the development of networking mechanisms between practitioners/service-providers and researchers as well as measures to support the design of relevant policies for social/care farming at regional and European level. One relevant indicator is the gender breakdown of participation in various platform events organised in the course of the SoFar work. In the case of the first European platform, 22% of the “invited” participants (6 of the 27) were female, while in the second EU platform, 26% (8 of the 31 invited participants) were female. If the national SoFar research project teams are included as participants at these events, the proportions rise to 31% and 33% respectively, reflecting the different gender balance among the research contingent involved. Available data on the gender composition of the National Platforms (NPs) suggest a more mixed picture. Female participation rates at these events ranged from 20-25% (Germany 2nd NP, Ireland 1st NP); 35-40% (Flanders 2nd NP, Ireland 2nd NP) to approximately 50% (Slovenia 2nd NP).
While it is not possible to generalise from such limited evidence, it is worth noting that the relevant academic and policy literature (relating to agriculture; social care; community/voluntary sector) makes frequent reference to women’s under-representation at strategic/decision-making/policy-influencing levels in these sectors (European Commission, 2002; National Development Plan Gender Equality Unit 2002, European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions, 2006). While the above discussion has focused on gender issues related to the provision of care services, there are also insights on gender issues and the receipt of care services from the SoFar work. Again, based on information from the national State of the Art Reports and the case studies that were undertaken, the general picture that emerges is that service-users are predominantly male – approximately 75% in many cases (Ireland, France, Netherlands and Slovenia). While this may be explained to some extent by a tendency to ascribe gendered work roles in relation to farming, it may also reflect the difficulties for recipients of care services in balancing their own roles as care-givers. For example, a theme that emerged among the national reports was that initiatives with residential programmes (typically alcohol or drug treatment centres) are frequently inaccessible to women due to the lack of childcare provision. Another salient factor cited frequently by service providers is the higher incidence of certain types of intellectual disability (e.g. Autism) among the male population.

Because of the “pioneering” and exploratory nature of much of the SoFar work, it can provide only partial answers to questions such as – whether there are different roles for men/women as service providers in social farming; whether there are gender differences in the uptake of certain types of initiatives and if so can we explain them; what is the gender profile of service users and providers across different countries/regions; does it vary much and why? Within the SoFar work, the desire to receive recognition and the ability to influence policy/decision-making processes have emerged as central challenges for all those who engage in it. From a gender perspective, what is at issue is whether such challenges are likely to be equally problematic for both men and women.
3.5 Economic features

The majority of social farming cases that were studied are organised in three types of working forms: farms (family farms, commercial farms), social organizations (social enterprises, social cooperatives) and institutions. Family farms are dominant in Flanders and in The Netherlands, while the organisational structure in other countries is more diverse. In France, social farming operates in the form of community gardens and urban farms, while in Italy social organisations prevail. In Slovenia, Germany and Ireland, social farming mostly takes place within various social care institutions.

Horticulture, mixed farming and animal husbandry are the most frequent types of production practiced by social farming initiatives. In Italy, France, Ireland and Slovenia there are some cases that are providing green services such as the maintenance of public parks.

As to the size of utilised land, there are cases that use less than 1 ha and cases that are using several hundred ha. In France and Slovenia social farming initiatives are rather small-scale operations using up to 20 ha of land. In The Netherlands where family farms are the dominant actors in social farming, they use from 20 ha to 40 ha, while family farms in Flanders, who are the main providers of green care in that region, tend to be slightly larger. Social farming initiatives in Italy are in the same range. On the other hand, social farming initiatives in Germany are comparatively large operations.

There is evidence that the modern concept of social farming has strong origins in the agricultural tradition in Europe. In Italy and Ireland more than half of the initiatives have been in operation for 20 years or more. Two of the cases studied in Ireland have been operational since the 1960s and in Italy since the 1970s. In Germany, the 1980s was the period when very many initiatives started to operate, while in France and Slovenia it was the 1990s. Institutional changes after the year 2000 in Flanders (the introduction of subsidies) and The Netherlands (personalised budget schemes) boosted the provision of green care on family farms in both countries.

Due to different organisational forms of social farming initiatives, the number of the service-users involved differs too. In the case of small-scale initiatives (community gardens, urban farms and family farms) the number of the service-users involved is rather small, while in the case of institutions and social organisations, the number is much larger. The most frequent number of service-users per initiative is three, while the average number is more than thirty.
The table shows that numerically, the smaller initiatives are far more frequent. In terms of service-users, on the other hand, there is a greater reliance on large-scale initiatives.

Day care with productive and meaningful activities, living and working, as well as labour integration and rehabilitation are the most frequent services that are provided by social farming initiatives in the majority of cases in all countries. Therapeutic activities are much less frequent in the portfolio of social farming initiatives. About one-third of the cases studied depend on public funds, while about one-fifth is funded by a combination of public and private funds. This varies widely between different countries and regions. Various EU Projects have been instrumental in establishing some projects in Ireland and Slovenia.

Social organisations in all countries combine public/private sources and market-based sales activities to fund their operations. Only a few cases are funded from private sources exclusively.

In Flanders family farms involved in green care receive a special grant of 40 € per day, irrespective of the number of users. Most care farms have a yearly revenue from care activities of 1,000 € to 10,000 € per year. The yearly costs vary from 100 € to 5,000 € per year. Insights from the Netherlands suggests that provision of care for 5 service-users, who are on the farm for 4 days a week with an average subvention per user of 50 € per day, generates additional income of 48,000 € annually. In this situation the costs are low and the contribution to family income will probably be more than 40,000 €. Social co-operatives in Italy have an average yearly turnover per organisation 770,000 € in case of social care, and 473,000 € in case of workforce integration.
that are hosting in average three service-users per day generate 165 € through their contract for a daily grant via social care public bodies. French social farming initiatives that combine organic vegetable production with the provision of different kinds of social services generates from 150,000 € up to 1.5 million € annually. In Ireland, a farm that collaborates with a health institution as a subcontractor gets 36,000 € per person per year on a residential basis and approximately 20,000 € per year for non-residential services. A family farm that co-operates with a social care institution in Slovenia shares 25-50 € per person per day as this is the amount that the institution is paid for its day care services. Slovenian social organisations involved in the provision of employment rehabilitation and labour integration for 50 users generate about 600,000 € per year through the provision of green services. It is entitled to an annual subsidy of 12,600 € per person.

Although social farming initiatives are non-profit mainly, it is obvious that social farming seeks and requires good management to ensure that activities are economically viable. Costs and revenues are more or less balanced on about half of social farming initiatives in all countries, while for the other half, this ratio does not apply – costs are rather high and revenues are rather low.

Investments in green care activities (facilities, equipment, tools for the service-users) depend not only on the economic situation but also on role of such services in the portfolio of the social farming initiative, as well as on the objectives in this field. One French co-operative has invested 400,000 €. In the Netherlands family farms’ investment into care activities varies between 200 € and 90,000 €. Two Slovenian social organisations with large-scale operations in green services (maintaining parks) invested between 300,000 € and 450,000 € in equipment and tools for the service-users.

It was very difficult for the promoters of social farming initiatives to assess the future prospects for their economic situation. Yet, those who made such a guess (about one third of all cases), were more or less optimistic: they felt that their economic situation would be better in five years’ time. They envisage that revenues from social services will increase more than the costs of their provision.

The holders of social farming initiatives were very reluctant to evaluate the economic importance of the social activities on the overall economic performance of an initiative. The majority of cases studied in Germany, relating to foundations in particular, reported
a considerable economic impact. The same situation is perceived by an Italian Type A social co-operative. Slovenian and German social organisations and institutions, as well as some family farms in the Netherlands see this impact as moderate. Very many family farms in Flanders consider it as limited or non-existent. Therefore, the situation is quite diverse. The economic impact depends on many factors such as holder’s attitude, his/her ambition in the field of social farming, the local system of social/health care and associated policies etc.

3.6 Policies and institutions in social farming

As emerged from the analysis of the cases, and as already presented in Chapter 1, social farming is quite differently shaped in different EU countries, notwithstanding the fact that it can present similar features and characteristics at the same time. Such diversity is based upon four main aspects. Each project is distinct because it is born from grassroots level with few opportunities for exchange with others; it may be directed at very different targets in terms of service-users; growth occurs in different institutional contexts regarding the social sector; and it follows a process of progressive adaptation depending on the emerging needs in local communities.

At EU level, the term “social farming” suggests a link with rural development policies as well as with social intervention at different institutional levels and in different fields, despite the fact that the process of recognition and integration between these policies is still under construction.

Regarding its integration into rural development (RD) policies, social farming (SF) fits with many emerging issues, as presented by the cases illustrated in Chapter 2:

- SF promotes a wider idea of multifunctional agriculture (as is the case for Hoeve de Ploeg farm in Flanders);
- SF diversifies on-farm activities and can involve new family members in health/care provision, enhancing job opportunities for women and young people (like in the Netherlands or in Flanders);
- SF is in keeping with the diversity that characterises rural EU areas and their social structure;
- SF may represent an opportunity to reduce the lack of services in rural areas and to re-design them in a more innovative way.
(Bellechambre farm in the Isere region in France acts in this way for adults with autism), increasing the quality of life and reducing the gap between urban and rural areas (in the case of the Kuhhorst farm in Germany), with regard to health/care provisions, especially for groups such as children (as in the Forteto case) and the elderly;

- SF improves farmers’ reputation in society and – directly or indirectly – their income (an aspect evident in the Colombini farm, Italy);
- SF offers services to urban citizens and establishes a new bridge between urban and rural areas (for farms working in peri-urban areas – e.g. Kuhhorst and the Colombini farm);
- SF re-introduces the concept of gift and reciprocity value, reinforcing social capital (this is clear in the Hoeve de Ploeg farm);
- SF reconnects local agriculture to local needs in a more sustainable and responsible way (the Brdca farm in Slovenja clearly reconnects agriculture to local social needs);
- SF fits in with a scenario of sustainable rurality that is able to organise vibrant communities in different EU rural areas and to offer more sustainable models for emerging countries.

SF should be better understood in the context of a multifunctional agriculture in order to promote innovative patterns of rural development that are less dependent on compensation and funding and better rooted in local resources and in a pro-active process of change. For the same reasons, the role of social services in rural development should be better analysed by RD policies, owing to their strong linkages and their involvement in rural development processes. This point has already been made by the OECD. SF can improve social services in rural areas but can also offer new and different solutions to social inclusion in urban and peri-urban areas (this is the case for Solid’Action as well as for Belmont farm).

5 The OECD Cologne meeting identified service delivery as a key to the development of rural regions. In this respect 6 key policy areas to improve service delivery in rural areas were mentioned: coherence with local needs and assets; equity and efficiency; innovative contracts among urban and rural; introduction of a logic based on investment rather than spending; organisation of effective and inclusive governance and strong innovation. It should be observed that SF is able to fit with all the six points addressed by the key message of the OECD Cologne meeting on Innovative Service Delivery and in this respect SF is able to offer more than minimum support to improve the social fabric in rural areas.

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5 The OECD Cologne meeting identified service delivery as a key to the development of rural regions. In this respect 6 key policy areas to improve service delivery in rural areas were mentioned: coherence with local needs and assets; equity and efficiency; innovative contracts among urban and rural; introduction of a logic based on investment rather than spending; organisation of effective and inclusive governance and strong innovation. It should be observed that SF is able to fit with all the six points addressed by the key message of the OECD Cologne meeting on Innovative Service Delivery and in this respect SF is able to offer more than minimum support to improve the social fabric in rural areas.
The definition of an EU common social policy is far from established at the present time. This is not to say that the EU has no policies in the social field. The intervention of the EU in social matters is based on the so-called “open co-ordination method” that encourages co-operation and exchange among Member States by using and promoting the use of best practice; the organisation of some minimum rules and regulations and some interventions approved by the Council.

In the field of health/care/educational services, SF is able to offer a new response to:

- the demand for new tools and innovative processes that are able to support professional services (farms like Belmont and Bellechambre came about through social care professionals who promoted the use of agriculture to improve the efficacy of the services offered) by valorising nature and informal relationships (Hoeve de Ploeg, Colombini and Brdca farms are clear examples where family farms were introduced in the local social structures);
- the increasing demand for personalisation and effectiveness of public health/care services;
- the opportunity to move to a caring strategy within the welfare system (see among the others the Bellechambre farm and the Belmont farm);
- the demand for services based on flexibility and proximity (as is the case of services for older people in the Netherlands);
- the need to increase efficiency in public services by using scope economies instead of scale economies.

The presence of different systems influences the organisation of services for rural areas, as well as the organisation of SF practices. In all the cases presented, the external institutional and cultural environment represents an active medium capable of influencing the evolution of a project by reinforcing it or putting constraints on it.

Perhaps, SF links together two sectors that are very differently regulated at EU level. The CAP is the most integrated policy in EU, while in social affairs, national policies are always dominant within a process of common co-ordination. Also welfare models⁶ are very

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⁶ According with M. Sibilla (2008) four different models can be defined across Europe: The social democratic: organised n northern EU Countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden and The Netherlands. This ensures universal rights to all citizens and it is based on high level of taxes.
differently shaped in EU countries in terms of how they impact on SF applications. At the same time, even where countries adopt the same welfare model\textsuperscript{7}, SF may be present in very different applications and characteristics\textsuperscript{8}.

In all EU countries the welfare system is under strong pressure. EU intervention is acting to facilitate co-operation and benchmarking of different systems in order to achieve common results. A better understanding of SF practices, their organisation and discussion about best practices, could facilitate the evaluation and the diffusion of innovative tools for social and workforce inclusion.

Most of cases presented are working in an interface between agricultural and health/social policies. Working in this space presents some opportunities but also some difficulties. Local project holders, especially when they are not strictly connected with institutional bodies, face some problems in trying order to harmonise their initiatives and to find material and personal supports. This is less relevant in case of the Netherlands and Flanders where the formalisation of the SF project is more effective and where rules and procedures are able to facilitate the start-up of new projects.

What is clear at this stage in Europe is that SF is a concrete activity, differently organised and harmonised in local/national rules and institutions, aiming for a clearer recognition from different stakeholders and policies.

\textbf{The corporatist model}: (France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg) where welfare is mostly related to workforce participation (workfare). There are different instruments that promote vocational training and a minimum wage for people not included in the labour force.

\textbf{The liberal model}: it is mainly related to the Anglophone culture. It is mostly based on different supports for families with specific problems (working families’ tax credits, disabled persons’ tax credits, child benefit).

\textbf{The mediterranean model}: it is based on a welfare mix (or welfare society) where the first and second sector (public and private) are integrated by the third sector and the family (fourth sector). The system is sometimes fragmented within different schemes. Voluntary associations are increasingly more active in organising networks, families play a strong role while there is no minimum wage for those who do not work.

\textsuperscript{7} When we consider countries that adopt a social democratic model, we note that in Finland and Denmark social farming is not very well developed while it is the opposite case in the Netherlands and in Norway.

\textsuperscript{8} In France and in Germany which adopt a corporatist model, SF is mostly addressed through workforce inclusion while in the Netherlands a wider range of services is offered.
There is a general question here. Is social farming just a useful way to re-organise care services by involving farmers, or does it represent the “tip of the iceberg” of a more fundamental change that is open to creating new linkages within the social and economic organisation of local society and to open the space for a ‘fifth sector’ related to organisations not specialised in service provisions?

Most of these aspects were analysed in depth during the SoFar project in the various platform activities by the different actors engaging in them. The subsequent chapters will provide more of a focus on them. The subsequent chapters will address these themes as well as possible strategies to adopt in order to increase the awareness of Social Farming across Europe.
4. Building a European stakeholders’ perspective of social farming

4.1 Overview

This chapter focuses on the presentation of the methodological approach adopted within the SoFar project that involved stakeholders in a collective dynamic, linking together researchers and practitioners, anchored in each country/region and scaled up at European level.

The mobilisation of this participatory approach led to the production of a shared vision of the strengths and weaknesses of social farming in Europe and identified key issues, questions and priorities to be dealt with at European level, as conditions for the development of social farming in Europe.

Those current policy issues need to be addressed by an intense European networking dynamic, anchored in our territories. It needs to be multi-purpose, with different mechanisms adopted for different functions. The SoFar networking dynamic shows the necessity of intervening simultaneously in different interdependent fields – policy-making, practices, skills recognition and knowledge production.

4.2 Action research to involve stakeholders in establishing social farming as a european policy focus

In this part, we outline the participatory approach that was implemented to involve stakeholders in the development of a European view on social farming and we also provide a preliminary assessment of the methodology used. It reflects the innovative way in which action research has been implemented in the development of social farming at a European scale. It also tries to identify the limitations in extrapolating this methodology to other contexts.
4.2.1 Intentions and unexpected results

The major goals of the SoFar project as outlined in its Technical Annexe are:
— To facilitate increased opportunities for meeting, making comparisons and interaction among participants, eventually leading them to produce shared position papers, at country/regional as well as European level, that will contain strategic proposals for innovation related to social farming (‘innovation strategies’).
— To create “a platform around the topic of social farming – bringing together key stakeholders and rural development researchers that can support the design of future policies at regional and European levels”.

The SoFar project looked at involving social farming stakeholders through the implementation of a participatory process utilising the platform methodology. This had a dual focus: to produce grounded research outcomes – innovation strategies – through the expression by stakeholders of “their” local diagnosis, needs and priorities; incorporating these findings as research inputs and legitimating those outcomes by organising European platforms with the participation of these stakeholders.

The expression of their vision of social farming and the legitimation exercise necessitated the implementation of a participatory approach at all levels: regional, country and European. This social process produced unexpected results: the emergence of a European network connecting professionals to each other, the gradual construction of a common, shared discourse and vision on the problems and priorities (more than the solutions) all of which eventually contributed to forging a social identity for this network.

From a research perspective, the social farming network was subject to the social process which took place during the project. We will see below that this evolution introduced some tensions into the project process arising from a conflict between constraints imposed by the contractual obligations of the project (limited time; imperative to produce particular outcomes) and the expectations generated by the social process, with its slow and uncertain evolution, producing its own knowledge and vision.

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9 Expressed by the German position paper for a European manifesto (see below).
4.2.2 The development of the participatory approach from local/national to European level

The methodological proposition used to develop this participatory approach was inspired by the Future Workshop model conceived and tested by the Danish Board of Technology\textsuperscript{10}. The Future Workshop Model was used as a reference point for the development of country/ regional platforms.

The central pillar of the methodology was the platform tool. The platform approach was constructed using two consecutive national/regional platform meetings and two European platform meetings. One goal of the whole dynamic was to build a cumulative process. Each of those meetings (from country/ regional level to European level) contributed to the construction of:

— mutual understanding of the situation in each country
— identification of “what we have in common”,
— insights into “what we can learn from each other”,
— joint reflection on questions and issues to be addressed to policy makers at European and at local levels.

All of this process needed to be rooted in the experiences and shared interests of the many stakeholders involved in the development of social farming in Europe that could be mobilised in those different fora.

The time issue proved to be a sensitive one. As with any project, there was a limited time-frame and resources. In this case, each sequence had to be choreographed carefully, as each stage in the sequence was feeding into the subsequent one. Consequently, the participatory dynamic was based on a gradual construction process, aimed at elaborating/ producing knowledge and propositions that needed collective involvement at local and European level.

The following scheme was adopted:

From month 8 to 16 of the project:

1. Each country organised one platform which lasted one day or more;
2. Then the 1\textsuperscript{st} EU meeting (month 16) took place with the participation of representatives from each national platform.

\textsuperscript{10} Experimented by the Danish Board of Technology, Copenhagen, Denmark. 
Box 4.1 – Key elements of the Future Workshop Model approach

The purpose of this workshop method was to allow for the formulation of concrete solutions and action proposals based on participants’ own experiences that can be put into practice. It was also to forge convergence between stakeholders’ concerns and visions towards a common strategic perspective. This method works best with 15-25 participants. This kind of workshop is a specific type of meeting that follows certain rules. During the course of the workshop there is time for brainstorming, debate, presentation and proposition. The work alternates between plenary sessions and group work. The workshop format and rules are there to ensure that everyone is heard, that all ideas are included in the debate and that participants work towards formulating an action/strategy plan. The Future Workshop model incorporates a 3-stage work process:

• A critical analysis is undertaken by each stakeholder group: attention is given to the critical analysis of the current situation. This analysis is documented. The most important points are selected and grouped into themes. This session concludes with a plenary where all groups present their diagnoses.

• The visionary phase done by each stakeholder group. The critical analysis in Phase 1 forms the basis of a brainstorming session. Suggestions and ideas are noted down on large poster boards as draft action proposals and these are grouped into themes. This session concludes with a plenary.

• The implementation/strategy development phase with mixed groups of stakeholders. This phase focuses on a critical evaluation of the draft action proposals. The possibility for action and strategy-building is assessed and the elaboration is developed further with the emphasis on more concrete steps towards action or the implementation of a project or development strategy. The time-frame for actions – from short to long term – is an important factor to take into consideration. This phase concludes with a plenary session.

Generation and presentation of results:

• Results: Action/policy proposals.

• Indirect results: The workshop creates debate and dialogue that often continues beyond the framework of the country/regional exercise. New links are forged that can lead to further exchange among the participants through their respective networks.

• Presentation of results: All workshop results are collated into a report into which additional matters relating to the project can also be included. This input was crucial for the European platform.
From month 16 to 24:
3. Each country organised a second platform;
4. The 2nd EU meeting was organised subsequently (month 24).
   In between these events, there was a fine-tuning process, using email, web and small-group meetings with specific groups of stakeholders.

Methodology of the European platforms:
The two European platforms had different objectives and characteristics.
The first one aimed to build a common knowledge base about the different situations in the various countries, in terms of experiences and the policy context. Understanding such diversity was considered as the appropriate starting point from which to reflect on common problems and priorities. So this first platform dedicated a lot of time to presentations and discussions about the concrete situations and lived experience of participants.

4.2.3 Some lessons learned from this participatory approach
To determine if this participatory approach could be used to stimulate social processes and deliberative policy elaboration in other contexts, we need to assess it.
The difficulty in undertaking such an exercise is in how to evaluate the quality of a social process. Should this be done by:
— examining the construction of a local and European networking relationship?
— examining the collective involvement in this construction process?
— observing policy-makers’ engagement with the process at national and European level?
— with reference to participants’ own assessment of the process?

Stakeholders involvement
160 people attended the first series of national platforms that took place during 2007.
170 people took part in the 2nd series which took place in early 2008 – many of whom were “new” participants that had not been involved in the first round of national platforms. These people were mainly social farming professionals (from farms); social and health services workers and researchers. Politicians and officials from
relevant administrations did not appear in significant numbers in
most countries.

Between 3 to 5 people per country emerged from these national
platforms to take part in the European platforms, while almost
50% of those who attended the second European platform had not
attended the first one.

In this process, policy-makers were conspicuous by their absence

We noted that policy-makers were weakly represented at local
and European levels. Despite invitations and the project’s clear focus
on the policy agenda, policy-makers were not significantly repre-
sented. This is true in particular regarding the local platforms and the
1st European platform. There were some encouraging signs at the 2nd
European platform. Nevertheless, even at the 2nd European platform,
Common Agricultural Policy officials did not appear, although a
European policy adviser and an officer from Social Affairs contrib-
uted and intervened. It is worth remembering that the SoFar project
had the objective of formulating proposals for the European policy
agenda about the development of the social functions of agriculture.
At European level, this absence of policy-makers and decision-mak-
ers from such fora is quite a common feature. It reveals a typical but
very real disconnect between research outcomes and policy-making.

Network-building and collective learning

In some countries, stakeholders already knew each other and
were part of similar networks – as in the cases of Belgium (Flan-
ders), Netherlands, Slovenia and Italy. In the other countries –
Ireland, Germany and France, the SoFar meetings facilitated the
building of networks and addressed the issue of how to make those
networks develop after the SoFar project.

In terms of how we assess the quality of the networks emerging
from the from SoFar process (their level of activity, their impact) –
only time will tell. During the project, they were able to produce a
diagnosis of their situation and a joint reflection on priorities at local
and European level.

This gradual construction occurred over one full year from
Spring 2007 (1st platform) to Spring 2008 (2nd platform), with the 1st
European platform taking place (Autumn 2007). This suggests that
collective learning at country and European levels needed time to
become established, for the deliberations to take place and for the
building of collective identity. A key outcome expressed by partici-
Participating stakeholders was the understanding of the reality of social farming in other countries; the awareness of the rich diversity and the expression/recognition of common problems and interests.

The German proposition put forward in the course of the participatory process a proposal to develop and adopt a Social Farming manifesto for Europe that reflects the emergence of this collective identity. The adoption by all countries of this manifesto during the SoFar project would have been a major outcome, anticipating the

### Box 4.2 - Collective SWOT analysis of social farming in Europe

#### Strengths
- **Practices & Relations**: high potential; tailor-made practices; comparatively cheap; small groups, social dimension, familiar character, large supply;
- **Territorial Dimension**: Integration at territorial level among society and economy; Increased sensitiveness and awareness, new ties, interest from consumers, effects on landscape;
- **Entrepreneurial Dimension**: innovation & diversification; involving youth in agriculture;
- **Care users**: strong benefits, support from families.

#### Weaknesses
- **Rules and laws**: judicial framework; limited extent of diffusion and consolidation; gap between demand and supply, dependence on public support, lack of recognition and evidence, strong heterogeneity;
- **Start-up**: Difficulties in starting up; distances (physically and figuratively); difficulties in integrating different professional “cultures”; confusion of roles and competences;
- **Local factors**: Prejudices about disability; Lack of transport.

#### Opportunities
- **Local Factors**: increasing sensitivity and demand from society, positive reputation; newcomers into agriculture;
- **Policies & Institutions**: new judicial framework; wider recognition and support, multifunctional agriculture;
- **Practices**: shift from medical to social model (citizens instead of patients), community integration (care in the community);
- **Networks**: broadening relations and networks;
- **Marketing**: enhanced reputation/image;
- **Increase in need**: European countries face an increase in citizens that will need care (e.g. ageing of society).

#### Threats
- **Policies & Institutions**: bureaucracy; standardisation, loss of original value systems; no institutional change, lack of interest;
- **Actors**: Competition among actors; development of opportunistic behaviours; market-oriented welfare systems; creations of “hospitals in the countryside”;
- **Practices**: incidents.
continuation of what has been established during the SoFar project. However, this did not happen and only Germany published the manifesto and distributed it among its partners. In other countries, the consultative process on the content of the manifesto is still ongoing (just before the end of the SoFar project). Why? The adoption of the manifesto proposed by German stakeholders by all project partners would have necessitated dedicated time at local and European level for the deliberations, amendments and adoption as a SoFar “outcome”. However, the time required could not be found, as it needed to be allocated to other goals and commitments – determined at the outset of the project.

Here we can see that the deliberative logic, with its uncertain and unplanned outcomes, is in conflict with the project management logic which must follow what has been promised (obligations regarding the results) three years previously.

A shared vision of strengths and weaknesses of social farming in Europe

According to the practitioners’ points of view, a collective view of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in social farming can be summed up as in box 4.2.

In all SoFar countries, meetings with a variety of stakeholders were organised. During these meeting the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities were discussed.

According to the views of practitioners, a SWOT on social farming can be summed up in a common grid as shown in box 4.2.

This synthesis represents the common grounds identified from the national or regional SWOT analyses presented above (Chapter 2).

Different limitations may contribute to inhibiting the development of social farming, such as:

— The disconnect between farming, social inclusion, employment and health care policies
— The novelty of systems of community-based social care that need experience and dissemination
— The still prevailing medical model of health
— Unsuitable support strategies, fostering the emergence of “hospitals in the countryside”
— Changes in care systems that potentially reduce quality.

The shift from the medical to the social model in social and health care and the focus on the empowerment of users and their rights are all positive developments.
A further stimulus of the entrepreneurial spirit in social farming could result in a strong business community that develops responsive new services and arrangements – services that are attractive for society because they find an optimal balance in “people, planet and prosperity values”. Such services are beneficial for different groups of service-users, for the viability of rural areas, for landscape and for the continuity of rural enterprise.

Policy development

At country level, stakeholders were invited to follow a gradual construction process going from the diagnosis of existing situations and policies within their own contexts towards the identification of priorities and actions for their own contexts – and eventually for a broader European scale.

Box 4.3 – Sample feedback from national/regional platforms

**France**

*The 1st French platform*

The objectives were presented as follows:

- To facilitate dialogue and debate between actors connected to social and therapeutic farming in our region, recognising their different professional backgrounds and levels of intervention;
- To encourage them to reflect (in small groups and collectively) on the current situation, on their perspectives and on the strategic priorities that need to be implemented to progress the development of social farming;
- To contribute to a broader debate and enlarge the networks;
- To produce a report after the platform which will be circulated and inform the European platform.

**Germany**

*The 2nd German platform*

It emphasise the importance (and possible modalities about) building and consolidating networking strategies at European and local levels. The initiative to propose the adoption at European level of the Witzenhausen manifesto on the added value of social farming also came from Germany, as a way of building a common basis for developing European networking.

**Netherlands**

*The 2nd Dutch platform*

Based on the results of the first national platform (June 2007) and the first European platform in Bruxelles (October 2007) we wanted to deepen the results of these first platforms and come up with more concrete recommendations for international networking and concrete actions for International co-operation. The objectives were made more explicit and presented to the participants as follows:

- To formulate a framework for a European research agenda
- To make an action programme for co-operation between different countries
- To formulate advice for national ministries on how to focus more on international issues with respect to social farming.
In that sense, the platform concept was very relevant in:
— Providing a local space within which exchange, debate and collective elaboration between researchers and professionals could take place;
— Enabling stakeholders to discover or deepen their knowledge of the reality of Social Farming in other countries;
— Enabling the gradual emergence of an awareness about the importance of the European dimension for the further development of social farming policies and initiatives in all countries.

The “point of departure” for the 2nd local platforms reflected the immediate concerns of platform participants, by highlighting:
— the importance of European and local network-strengthening
— the necessity to tackle joint regulatory and policy goals at EU level
— the importance of valuing the territorial impacts of social farming for our regions and countries.

The scaling-up process at the European platform level
The evaluations of European platform process by participants were generally very positive. Expectations regarding these meeting were usually very high. Participants in local platforms had valued roles as representatives in these European events and took them very seriously – becoming heavily involved in the debates and in (in)formal exchanges. They left those events with a clear explicit intention to continue the exchanges and formalise them beyond the So Far project.

After the European platforms, what was assessed:
Positively:
— the knowledge and understanding of what is going on in other countries and increased awareness about the rich diversity of experiences,
— the need for social farming in Europe to develop a coherent and harmonised vision based on a common definition; joint priorities/actions and policy objectives,
— the opportunity for participants to develop inter-personal relationships that could lead to co-operation.
More negatively:
— the difficulty in achieving concrete results – such as common actions – and a circular dynamic which gave the impression
of repetition. This was due largely to the difficulties in trying to bring forth a shared joint vision of the kind of policies and instruments that need to be developed in Europe for social farming,

— the predominance of the research logic and rhetoric in the European fora, in contrast with most local platform dynamics, where researchers were supposed to be observers and facilitators and social farming professionals were to be the predominant players.

After the 2nd European platform, the following questions were asked:

• What did you expect of the platform meeting? Were your expectations fulfilled?
  – I expected the formulation of more concrete actions. In this respect the meeting did not fulfil my expectations. Maybe I hoped for more tangible outcomes. But it all takes time…
  – Contacts, exchange, nice people. Yes, this was satisfactory.
  – The topic and goal was as difficult as the meeting itself.
  – The elaboration of a definition of SoFar and the manifesto has been started.

• Did they inspire you for your work?
  – The outcomes of the local platforms were probably more enriching for continuing the work at regional level.
  – At EU level, we should have focused our discussion on how and with whom to consolidate EU network. This should have been the main strategy and action to propose to the EU. This was what people had worked in their local platform.

### 4.3 The production of social farming policy positions by social farming professional actors

In this part, we present a synthesis of the main questions, propositions and priorities developed by social farming actors in the course of the platforms. These propositions were produced through deliberations aimed at meeting the following objectives:

• To provide a new European-wide perspective (information and knowledge obtained in the previous stages of the project), in order to build continuity;
• To reflect on and propose a set of priorities to be tackled at local and European levels;
• To agree the content of what could be formulated at subsequent European fora.

4.3.1 Debates on definitions and patterns of social farming in Europe: what are we talking about?

The general definition about social farming is not yet agreed across Europe. There are still different ways of talking about the phenomenon (farming for health; green care; social farming; gardening therapy; green programmes of social/health care) and of using agriculture or gardening for social/health purposes. In one sense, stakeholders from the different participating countries underlined the necessity to adopt a common base, as a pre-condition for the development of any network. Social farming needs a clear definition, in which its identity (in national and European contexts) and its relationship to the health/social and agricultural systems in each country is well expressed. On the other hand, a major feature of the way social farming is being developed in the seven countries is diversity with regard to:
— policies and administrative schemes
— organisational and operational forms
— economic and social logic.

During the 1st EU platform meeting in October 2007 in Brussels the stakeholders had fruitful discussions. It was stated that social farming is diverse. The different administrative models and cultures in Europe suggest the need for convergence and finding a common ground. The diversity in social farming and definitions impacts on political strategies. There was a discussion on whether to exclude or include initiatives on the basis of the definition used. Whereas the “inclusion” or broad approach is seen as a strength, it was also stated that the “melting pot situation” or the “big basket with many different things” does not enable the targeting of policies effectively and strategically. Some stakeholders had the opinion that a clear definition or a “common slogan” is needed (“to map Social Farming”) as a means of addressing people and “persuading the European public”. Others mentioned that such a definition should relate to the “original values” associated with social farming. Therefore, defining a characterisation or a description should be achieved. The questions of professionalisation versus solidarity and the balance between farming and social activity remained unsolved.
Social farming professionals involved formulated different propositions, such as:

- Social farming covers a set of activities which all have a double dimension – production/valorisation of agricultural production and services on one hand and hosting/support (therapeutic and labour inclusion) to vulnerable groups on the other hand (France).
- Social Farming definition should include the re-establishing of the social function of agriculture. It should recognise promotion of societal wellbeing rather than targeting of particular people with disabilities (Ireland).
- Green programmes of social assistance/healthcare are an option for social or healthcare assistance, as a rule carried out as a subsidiary occupation on a family farm, where the users work with farm animals, cultivated plants and soil, or use its available resources. Agricultural activities (arable farming, horticulture, cattle farming) carried out by companies or social assistance, healthcare and educational institutions are also considered as green programmes (Slovenia).
- Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture: the main products, in addition to saleable produce, are health and employment, education or therapy. Agriculture offers opportunities for people to participate in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals (Germany).\textsuperscript{11}

The different ways of thinking and building social farming in the different countries was debated during the platforms. During those exchanges, the Dutch perspective, the ‘Polder model’ emerged, as a reference point, about which stakeholders expressed their position.

Some actors agreed on the characteristics of the Dutch model. It was considered to be the cheapest one in terms of subsidies and efficiency. Within it, service-users remain quite autonomous as they are more or less consumers with their own budgets. Additionally, relationships with the policy-making authorities are more direct and clearly articulated. This model seems to be based on a kind of ideal internalised by many people based on the hypothesis that disability

\textsuperscript{11} Witzenhausen Position Paper on Added Value in Social Farming. Call to decision-makers in industry, administration, politics and the public to support social agriculture in Germany. Compiled by participants of the workshop “Value-added in social farming”. 26 to 28th October 2007 in Witzenhausen, Germany.
should not be seen as a cost for society. But if it there is a cost, how should it be reimbursed? This vision about inclusion could lead to the negation of disability as a specific social issue to be dealt with by society. Others expressed reservations about the Dutch model: “I don’t agree with the vision of that considers social farming as an activity to enhance the income of farmers” (an Italian partner). The German perspective seemed also very interesting; very diverse groups of service-users; very different activities for those service-users; diversity of products – all of which operate within complex organisations.

4.3.2 Key questions arising within the European platform process

It is clear that the platform process was characterised by diversity – in terms of stakeholders’ backgrounds, experiences and perspectives on social farming. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some concrete questions that emerged during the EU platform process. To some extent, these questions contributed to identifying the priority areas for an innovation strategy for social farming in the EU – which will be discussed subsequently in this book.

How service-users needs and rights should be incorporated into social farming practices and policies?

This is highly relevant given that less empowered/marginalised groups and people of low contractual capacity are such key stake-

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<th>Box 4.4 – Key questions from the 1st European platform</th>
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<td>The following concrete questions were addressed by social farming professionals during the 1st European platform:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How do we ensure that the rights/needs of service users are incorporated into social farming practices and policies? What methods should be used to achieve this?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How much agriculture should be involved in social farming?</td>
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<td>• How much social farming should be interwoven with agriculture – i.e. should it be seen a “niche activity” within farming and if so, what does this mean for policy?</td>
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<td>• How do we persuade institutions and policy-makers to exploit the benefits of social farming?</td>
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<td>• How should policies and structures across the relevant sectors be “joined-up” to provide the necessary supports to different types of social farming?</td>
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<td>• How can policy-making support the development of appropriate quality control and standards without losing values/identities?</td>
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<td>• Are there any logical and necessary steps in the development of social farming? And if there are – which ones?</td>
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holders. For many of the service users associated with social farming, there are significant challenges in trying to influence policies and practices in “conventional” ways and in bringing insights from their own lived experience to bear on the policy-making process in meaningful ways. The local/national context is an important factor in establishing the extent to which service-users’ perspectives can be incorporated within a rights-based, entitlement or social justice framework as this varies widely across countries. There is an equally strong challenge for those with whom the service-users engage to ensure that appropriate mechanisms for influencing policies are developed and disseminated. This issue has a particular resonance for researchers in developing and using participatory processes that can act as a means of accessing other people’s worlds; making those worlds accessible to others and putting people in charge of how they represent themselves and how they depict their situation. As others have argued, such approaches represent a shift in the control of the “politics of representation” from the professional to the beneficiary and from the observer to the observed 12.

To which extent agriculture and social farming are interlinked?

Issues such as the diversity of experiences, the different trajectories of social farming and the local/national contexts are relevant. There are clear distinctions between initiatives where agricultural resources are used in a purely therapeutic setting with little or no emphasis on production versus conventional “working farms” where a proportion of the agricultural resources are allocated to the provision of care services and many other arrangements which may be seen as “hybrids” of these approaches.

By which means institutions and policy-makers can be persuaded to exploit the benefits of social farming?

Central to this issue is the need to increase awareness of social farming not only among agricultural and rural stakeholders – but also among other relevant sectoral interests (health, education, social services, justice etc). This, in turn, takes us back to the issue of an appropriate definition for social farming. As outlined earlier, because diversity in social farming is one of its hallmarks, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to have a definitive “label”. At the

12 See for example, Booth T., Booth W. (2003), In the frame: Photovoice and mothers with learning difficulties. Disability & Society, 18 (4), pp. 431-442.
same time, there is a need to highlight and communicate the common features that characterise social farming in different settings. This is essential in communicating the benefits of social farming to institutional interests, policy-makers and the wider society. There is also a need to build the evidence base about the benefits of social farming by undertaking and supporting research initiatives based on appropriate methodologies; identifying and disseminating of examples of best practice and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience among practitioners.

*How policies and structures across the relevant sectors should be “joined-up” to provide the necessary supports to different types of social farming?*

A characteristic of social farming is the range of policy domains across which it intersects. These include agriculture, health, rural development, environment, education and social services, among others. Not only are there major challenges in formulating policies across the range of sectors involved (agriculture, health, social affairs etc.), but also within particular policy domains (such as agriculture or rural development). In many countries, the absence to date of a coherent policy framework has meant that in practice, there is no obvious “home” for social farming initiatives. This often has clear practical implications for practitioners such as an over-dependence on a “mosaic” of intermittent funding sources and an inability to develop initiatives beyond a pilot basis – which in turn contributes to the fragmented and *ad-hoc* nature of social farming initiatives in many countries. It appears that it is the smaller states (such as the Netherlands and Belgium) where regional/national networks are strongest that have been most successful in developing a level of policy coherence around social farming activities.

They are more likely to have easy access to key decision-makers in different domains of policy and the requisite institutional and financial support. By contrast, more complex forms of decentralised governance, such as that which is currently underway in France, has led to less availability and greater uncertainty around the level of funding available for farming for social farming initiatives. In the case of Germany, the problems of policy coherence and co-ordination are amplified by the fact that the country has 16 federal states, many of which have differing institutional frameworks across sectors such as agriculture, social services and health and education, among others.
How to develop appropriate regulation (standards and quality control measures)?

This must be viewed against a backdrop of very different local/national contexts and experiences. For example, the regulatory and legal environment in which social farming operates across Europe varies widely. It may be embedded primarily within sectors such as health (the Netherlands); the agriculture sector (Flanders); it may be linked with the social inclusion/social economy agenda (France, Italy, Germany) or the education sector (France) to a greater or lesser extent. In other countries, it may be considered conspicuous by its absence. In addition, regulatory frameworks relevant to Social Farming are embedded within profoundly differing welfare systems across the EU. The prevailing welfare model will shape the regulatory and legal environment in which social farming operates in different countries. Again the issue of coherence is an important one – how measures and instruments are framed and “joined-up” so as to be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. A shared characteristic of social farming across Europe is the importance of individuals’ and groups’ own beliefs and value systems in building initiatives from the “bottom-up” in a pioneering spirit. A recurrent theme throughout the SoFar process was the question of balancing the imperative to have the necessary standards, monitoring and quality systems while not negatively impacting on the personal values and commitments which underscore many of these activities. There is a need for regulatory/legal instruments to provide the requisite degree of support, guidance and clarity for stakeholders without stifling the innovation, imagination and creativity which are hallmarks of social farming as it has evolved to date. However, this needs to be balanced against the imperative to safeguard the interests of service-users who are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. Related to an earlier question on the rights of service-users, there is a real challenge to identify mechanisms by which their needs remain paramount in the development and implementation of a legal and regulatory framework and in finding ways in which they can influence the process in a meaningful way.

Are there logical steps to progress the development of social farming?

There are significant differences in the trajectories of development; the focus of the initiatives; their origins; their organisational forms; their structures and scale and the underlying local/national
contexts. At the same time, there are a number of priority issues of shared concern among stakeholders which need to be addressed – many of which need to be considered as indivisible from each other rather than as a set of linear stages of progression. These include the need to find common ground on how social farming is defined and recognised; how knowledge systems related to social farming can be improved and better communicated; how national and international networks on social farming can be developed or strengthened and how an appropriate quality and standards framework can be developed. None of these questions can be addressed in isolation and at the same time progress in any one area can generate positive synergistic effects related to other issues.

**4.4 A policy process: building and consolidation of networking dynamics**

In many countries and regions, social farming networks already exist, albeit with different functions and based on different criteria:
- The Netherlands and Flanders region are probably those that are the most co-ordinated. The networks play a role in interfacing with administrations/policy-makers and in providing technical support to the care farming sector.
- In other countries the situation is more complex. In the face of fragmented national and regional policy-making schemes, which separate health, employment and agriculture policies, different coalitions may co-exist, such as social inclusion networks in one arena and more dispersed care/health initiatives in a different arena.

Notwithstanding the specificities of different networks and how they interact with policy-making, in all cases they aim to provide these different functions:
- To be a tool of political intervention that engages in regional and national public policy debate to defend common interests;
- To work as a space for initiating, exchanging and capitalising on experiences;
- To be a channel of communication about the characteristics and social contribution of social farming.

Another important dimension of these relational dynamics is the driving impact they may have at territorial level. In some countries,
social farms, especially in co-operative or associative forms (France, Italy, Germany) tend to extend their political, economic, technical and social relationships into arenas such as rural re-vitalisation. Partially, this arises from their interest in communicating what they do; also because they need to develop such economic and technical exchanges and partly because local funding structures expect them to have such impacts.

The participatory dynamic within the SoFar project was possible because of all those existing connections. Based on those experiences of building such relationships, professionals who participated in the platforms saw an urgency in the need to scale up those relationships at European level.

These networking dynamics need to be multi-purpose, with different mechanisms according to their different functions. It does not mean that different networks deal with different functions. The SoFar networking dynamic shows the necessity of intervening simultaneously in different interdependent fields – policy-making, practices, skills recognition and knowledge production. The potential influ-

### Box 4.5 – Proposition from Germany to set up a European network

As an example, we present below what was proposed by German actors in social farming at their 2nd country platform. It covers most of propositions outlined in other national platforms concerning the need for European level network construction.

**The implementation and structure of the European network.**
- The network needs a strong basis at national (or regional) level initially.
- It is doubtful whether a (virtual) network relying on the internet can develop into a “real network”. The co-ordination of the networking activities should be supported and forthcoming. Participants and stakeholders would be over-stretched to do it themselves. This co-ordination needs dedicated responsible professionals who would take on the task of convening meetings; providing reports; organising events etc.
- The European network could be organised at two levels: an inner “circle” (the key stakeholders involved) and a broader circle that is open to the external actors.
- There are farms and practitioners who need information themselves. It is important that interested people find a central point (i.e. SoFar website) that directs people systematically to particular farms as appropriate.

**… Specific actions (education)**

The European network should be strengthened via specific actions such as education or exchange among farmers (instead of making “global statements”). In the early stages it should be focused on a special action where stakeholders attach their personal interests. Later on additional tasks can be added and the network can grow.
ence of this network in terms of modification of existing frameworks depends on its capacity to intervene in those different arenas.

The policy function has the objective of getting recognition, support and harmonisation measures for social farming from European authorities. To achieve such goals, the policy network component should:

- propose a manifesto which focuses on this common base and expresses its values, objectives and its means of reaching them. This can serve as an instrument for “recruiting” interested actors;
- should serve as a way to be recognised as a discussion partner at EU level;
- provide a framework for the development of rules and guidelines;
- focus on some tangible actions;
- work with existing networks on how to raise the issue of coordination between other groups or networks.

The professional function consists of stimulating technical and professional exchanges in order to share experiences and practices, build a body of references and progressively codify practices among European social farming professionals. This could be done by:

- promoting cross-sectoral involvement through exchanges in the network, linking social and health stakeholders with farming stakeholders
- setting up channels and spaces for exchange of ideas between farmers, health organisations and policy-makers and exchanges between service-users
- building an international database (and website), accessible to different interested parties with various levels of information in different languages.

The research and production of knowledge function for an EU research agenda is addressed through this networking dynamic dealing with policy issues, technical and professional matters. This activity could focus on identifying those knowledge and research priorities that are currently lacking or absent. These could include:

- knowledge production about care farming such as a systematic inventory of social farming initiatives and policies in the 27 European member states and a mapping of the structure and organisational forms of the social farming sector in different countries (their networks; their organisation models)

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Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture. The main products, in addition to saleable produce, are health and employment, education or therapy. Agriculture offers opportunities for people to participate in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals. Social farming includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or emotional illness; farms which offer opportunities for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders or those with learning difficulties, people with drug dependencies, the long-term unemployed and active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and many more. Prevention of illness, inclusion and a better quality of life are all features of social agriculture.

Throughout Europe social farming initiatives are springing up. Farming enterprises are increasingly becoming the focus of development in rural areas, creating work and employment for the socially disadvantaged and people with disabilities and taking on an educational role. In countries such as Italy, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands these individual initiatives have long since grown into movements, thanks to political and financial support. The development of social farming in Germany is lagging behind that in Europe. In the Netherlands and Belgium the number of Care Farms is growing rapidly. They integrate people with disabilities and therefore receive assistance from central co-ordinating authorities. In Italy, agricultural co-operatives are providing new jobs for socially disadvantaged people in underdeveloped areas. And in Scandinavia family businesses are developing new sources of income through providing social services.

In Germany...

...The Future of Social Farming in Germany needs support and a reliable framework: This includes:

1. Recognition of the added value of social farming for society
   The added value created for society by social farming must receive recognition and targeted support. The diversity of social and cultural services and the social endeavour for people and nature need public support in order to maintain and develop the various fields of activity in social farming. The integrative and educational work in particular, but also the health provision and therapeutic effects of social farming (through meaningful work and therapy, responsible use of natural resources, sustainable nutritional education) must be recognised, encouraged and researched further. The potential cost-savings for health insurance schemes and the health sector as a result of health improvements appears to be an additional argument.

2. Creating transparency in the legal framework
   The confusing variety of laws, authorities and funding options for all user groups and providers as a result of the federal structure but also the responsibilities of different government departments needs to be made more transparent and accessible to agricultural enterprises. In addition, marginal groups in particular who do not fit any medical diagnosis or have fallen through the social security net, such as young people disaffected by school, burn out patients, the homeless, asylum seekers or emigrants need a legal framework which enables them to participate in social farming.

3. Fostering communication and the exchange of experience
   The opportunities for sharing experiences between different initiatives which have been very limited to date need to be improved. Pioneer projects with their own history and development that are often unaware of one another need to be linked up and co-operation within existing networks needs to be promoted. Initiatives in social farming can be supported and access new sources of funding through joint publicity, publications,
### Box 4.6b – Witzenhausen position paper on added value in social farming

| a presence on the Internet and political representation of their interests.  
4. Setting up a central network and advisory service with co-ordinating responsibilities  
Social farming needs contact points. The creation of a central network and advisory service which could be established within the framework of existing advisory provisions would be a first step in overcoming the lack of transparency in the system of laws and authorities, officials, networks, funding and initiatives. This co-ordination would not only bring together supply and demand for social services on farms, but would give competent advice on options for further training and funding, thus helping to develop and implement good ideas in the long term. The remit of this institution would also include representing the interests of social farming and informing the public.  
5. Promotion of education and training opportunities, supervision and coaching  
Education and training in social farming must be promoted by support for existing educational initiatives and the setting up of new ones. The job profile combines skills and qualifications in different disciplines and supplements the traditional job description of the farmer. Education and training measures will secure, improve and develop the quality of social and agricultural services on farms.  
6. Support for interdisciplinary research on social farming  
Social farming needs support from research in the fields of therapy and medicine, social work and agriculture and education which cannot be separated from one another in the actual life and work on the farm. What is learned from experience regarding the effectiveness of integrating people in the daily and yearly rhythms on the farm and the communal agricultural work needs to be documented and used for the further development of social farming. There needs to be support for the work in caring for nature and the cultural landscape which is made possible on social farms through many helping hands. Interdisciplinary research which disseminates the knowledge gained from experience and integrates and supervises participating actors from practice, service-user groups and administration, can foster innovative ideas and involvement in social farming. Scientific support for pilot projects can be of help in the development of models based on single enterprises and cooperatives right up to entire model regions.  
7. Promotion of European co-operation  
The co-operation at a European level which has been started through the SoFar project (Soziale Landwirtschaft – Soziale Leistungen multifunktionaler Höfe [Social Farming – Social services on multifunctional farms], www.sofar-d.de), the COST- Action Green Care in Agriculture (www.umb.no/greencare) and the Farming for Health international working group (www.farmingforhealth.org) must be supported and developed. Practitioners and scientists throughout Europe need to learn from one another through the exchange of ideas, practical solutions and research projects in order to make innovative ideas and solutions available for practical application.  
8. Outlook  
Social farming enterprises already provide society with added value at several levels within multifunctional agriculture. The measures for supporting social farming detailed in this position paper call upon politicians, ministers, scientists, consumers and the wider public to be aware of, recognise, maintain and promote these services. Social farming opens up the social, cultural, educational and therapeutic potential of managing the land.  
We do not want to see social farming as merely another specialist option for agricultural enterprises, but also as a possible building block for a more socially-minded future. Social agricultural enterprises within transparent systems offer opportunities for the individual development of those in need of help, a sustainable approach to managing nature and the revitalisation of rural areas. When many individuals act in concert and develop social values, small-scale alternatives to the advancing rationalisation, competition and price wars are able to emerge. The added value of social farming opens up prospects of a potential paradigm shift. |
an assessment of the effectiveness of social farming, its specific qualities and critical success factors.

Direct consultation with service-users and representative organisations should be part of the research processes.

In order to broaden such interventions, it is essential to have active coalitions at regional and national levels that can attract and enrol new stakeholders and organisations and can communicate about those multiple actors at European level. The German position paper proposes a European manifesto for social farming development and may be an instrument for asserting what social farming is about and mobilising stakeholders regarding their common interests and priorities.

### 4.5 Concluding remarks

We see the scope of the debate that needs to be undertaken throughout Europe in relation to social farming.

- Should social farming be an additional business or niche within a multi-functional/service agriculture?
- Should it be a model for developing a socially-minded and sustainable future in our societies?
- Should we consider service-users as clients or partners in this new social model?
- Should we let supply and demand be the pillars of social farming development?
- Should we see social farming as a specific activity that needs to be supported or one that is driven by public instruments and policies?

Questions and answers are numerous. Countries and regions in Europe have chosen different ways to deal with those key issues. Beyond this diversity, there are common interests and visions, expressed by practitioners and researchers, of the benefit of social farming for our societies.
5. Priority areas and innovation strategies for further developing Social Farming in Europe

5.1 Introduction

The final goal of the SoFar project was to create “a framework as well as a platform around the topic of social farming – bringing together key stakeholders and rural development researchers – which can support the design of future policies at regional and European levels”. In a way the SoFar project represented a launch pad for a networking process devoted to the organisation of a pathway of change in social farming across Europe. Therefore, regional fora and a final international forum were organised to define common objectives and to formulate priority areas and innovative strategies.

The construction of an EU view on social farming was the main focus of the discussions. The regional fora tried to build a common idea about the various perspectives on social farming, but also the actions necessary to organise at EU and country/regional levels. At the final EU platform in Bruxelles the results of the national fora were compiled and used to identify some priority areas. The final aims of the platform were:

— To formulate a framework for a European research agenda,
— To make an action programme for co-operation between different countries, to improve social farming projects and enable exchange of experiences,
— To formulate innovative strategies for the further development and embedding of Social Farming in a European context,
— To integrate Social Farming into policy at regional level and at EU level,
— To build up a policy network at local and EU levels.

As already presented in Chapter 4, the 2nd EU platform represented a crucial point in the process. It was not only the most critical part of the participatory process that had been established, but also
the concluding event within the SoFar project. As noted previously, in the time available, the opportunities to debate and to exchange on quite critical points, to involve new stakeholders at the institutional EU/national level and to define an active plan were constrained. The process would need and deserved more time than was available to the project. Some of the points emerging during the discussion should have been more fully debated and discussed with the participants. Starting from the main points that emerged during the national and the EU platforms, new proposals were formulated by the research group and organised in a common framework. This chapter first presents some introductory topics related to a policy network and the process of change in social farming. Then, a Programme of Action for Social Farming is introduced for which 4 priority areas are selected. In combination with the priority areas, innovation strategies are formulated and elaborated for different levels and in different perspectives.

The Manifesto proposed by the German Team in combination with the Programme of Action and the Innovation Strategies can be considered as entry points for a new step in the process, aimed at improving and sharing these documents; implementing them at country/regional level as well as at EU level in a policy networking activity.

5.2 A bottom-up approach and policy network for a new perspective on Social Farming

Platform participants were acutely aware that the work of stakeholders involved in the field had the capacity to bring about changes in social farming (SF). For this reason there was also a lot of work to do to define the instruments and organisations necessary to enable this process. Some aspects emerged particularly strongly from the platforms, for example:

- the strong commitment of most of the people involved in SF;
- the awareness that a bottom-up approach is the right way to scale up the debate around the topic without losing the relevant values inherent in SF practices;
- the opportunity to progressively include additional institutional stakeholders in the discussion and to build awareness about the evidence and the impact of SF across Europe.

The idea to organise a specific network emerged as a common idea. Networking activities are seen as ways of bringing about
change in individual countries as well as at EU level. Networks may often create conditions for political intervention in a new field. The role of policy networks and the definition of some priority areas were debated during the SoFar Platforms with the EU stakeholders.

Policy networks are normally established as means of adding new topics for consideration around a particular theme; of building communities of actors; of clarifying the meaning and understanding of the topic to be conveyed to external actors; of promoting the topic to a wider public (by research, communication and information, training, examples of good practice); of facilitating the establishment of new relationships and activities related to the subject and of attracting the funds and investments necessary to achieve the aforementioned aims. In this respect, the increasing evidence about social farming could be used to facilitate the organisation of policy networks, both at regional, country and EU level (Di Iacovo, 2007). The main task of these networks would be to reflect on experiences in order to trigger a process of innovation. More generally, policy networks can act to support ideas and thematic groups or may play a role in presenting the topic in wider arenas. Policy networks can: filter alternatives and ideas to arrive at policy recommendations; amplify and disseminate a message or an idea by means of a communication process and by organising and exchanging practices; provide resources for investments; convene people – bringing together groups and individuals; build communities to protect themselves from outside threats and facilitate the work in a more effective way.

In SF, policy networks also play a function in building the evidence on the topic, on a step-by-step basis at this stage mainly at country/regional level. There is a growing debate about how to improve the dissemination of evidence and diffusion of information about projects and practices in SF in Europe. Quite often, reflection on the use of agriculture for social purposes starts from local isolated experiences, but it moves quite swiftly towards an expanding network that is able to link together different and new public and private actors. Some of the main points of debate are related to exchanges about experiences and their effectiveness; reflection on the future of social farming, the relationships between policies of different sectors and the possibility of exploring new and more dedicated policies. This slow process increases the awareness of the people involved and, at the same time, can reinforce and improve the evidence base and relevance of social farming and promote an institutionalisation of the new practices. From this point of view,
social farming is comparable to a novelty in a strategic niche which can grow. The niches are managed at local level within different regimes (the institutional welfare system). The establishment of new practices reinforces the evidence about the value of agriculture for social purposes and attracts new subjects. As a consequence, it becomes easier to negotiate and to influence public institutions and to promote changes in existing regimes. This process is normally fed by the organisation of policy networks that can establish and develop relationships and actions.

The process of change in SF is strongly dependent on the local capability to build specific pathways of change that promote the passage from a novelty situation (where pioneer and individual projects are mainly present\textsuperscript{15}), to niches (where single projects groups are established and new local networks and communities of interests are defined).

In many cases networks are born in an informal way by producing trust, common understanding and designing new processes, practices and forms of collaboration (Marsden, 2004). At the very early stage these processes are far removed from institutional regulation and from any specific support. They define new arenas for debate where new actors may convene and start up a process of collective learning able to design new paradigms (with an increas-

\textsuperscript{15} Novelties: when mainly individual initiatives are built it can be assimilated to the pioneering stage; Niches: in this case relationships start to be established and a new arena start to be defined. There are single project groups collaborating inside but not connected each other; Paradigms: relationships and exchange of information are increased and new knowledge are established; Regimes: a new set of rules start to be defined, affecting institution and the juridical framework.
Social Farming in Europe

The awareness of many stakeholders and the development of new knowledge about the phenomenon. However, initiatives may also fail and revert towards isolated practices again. In such cases, external support can be useful. The awareness of public institutions or agencies may inform a process of animation setting up new contacts and rebuilding arenas for debate. When paradigms consolidate, they can influence the organisation of new set of rules and may inspire the organisation of new regimes (fig. 5.1) (Wiskerke, 2004).

In all contexts SF is, by its diffusion, already offering different kind of services to local society, sometimes without any recognition. We can reflect on the opportunity to promote SF across the EU and about policies that can support the facilitation of the organisation of SF. Policies networks at country and EU level should promote the debate around specific priority areas as set out in this chapter. By acting on different priority areas, according with regional/country/EU situations, different actors involved should be able to promote SF in different contexts:

- understanding and recognising of SF
- testing and improving of SF
- diversifying the scope and mainstreaming of SF
- promoting and integrating SF
- rethinking and deepening SF.

This can promote SF among different EU countries in a comparative way. The passage from one step to another is normally linked to the organisation of policy networks at local level that can act in order to convene new actors, to promote the sector and to advocate new policies and new interventions.

5.3 Mainstreaming Social Farming in Europe

The main objectives for a Programme of Action are:

a. An analysis and integration of SF at macro, meso and micro levels according with some specific priority areas. These levels mutually interact in a nested hierarchy (see fig. 5.2 and table 5.1).

b. The mainstreaming of SF in projects and programmes at regional and country levels, in Rural Development policies (RD) as well as their integration into other related policies (Health, Care, Employment, Justice, Education).
c. SF capacity-building to underpin the Commission’s capacity and to mainstream SF issues effectively.

The *macro level* comprises major societal trends and developments – such as political culture, worldviews, regimes and demography. It presents for example SF issues at EU policy level, relating to EU commitments to the CAP Health Check, the EU Agreement for Mental Health and Human Well-being and developments regarding multifunctionality in agriculture and socialisation of care. The reflection of these national commitments in sectoral policies and in national development plans should be taken into consideration at this level. The representation of SF at the highest decision-making levels (public and private sector) and the collection and reporting of national statistics are also issues which must be examined at this level. The checklist of issues to be considered at macro level also includes a question as to whether or not a budgetary analysis of SF within the relevant sectors has taken place.

At *meso level*, relevant issues are the dominant structures, cultures and operational methods. It concerns the patchwork of paradigms in the fields of policy, culture, science, technology and delivery systems which may or may not reflect adherence to principles of SF in their structures and in the services they provide in different fields of social organisation. The emergence of co-operation between individual farmers or organisations, national and international networking and the governmental support are examples of developments at meso level. Institutions and organisations that are particular advocates of SF issues may be important stakeholders at this level.
The **micro level** addresses SF at farm/project level and at community level and looks at the innovative organisation of practices, access for local users and institutions and the interaction of project holders and institutions within which such practices should be valorised. Examples are the small scale initiatives with biodynamic farms by individual committed farmers who are outside mainstream agriculture and/or single project or small group projects regarding SF. In some countries SF projects can also be run in an informal way and may not be explicitly recognised. Different stakeholders for SF issues, including users and farmer’s organisations and institutions at this level, should also be identified. They do not belong to the main structures of the system (regime), but are important in bringing about structural changes.

In the *table 5.1* below we tried to connect different countries according to a number of variables such as activities that have to happen at different levels (*micro, meso, macro*); the stages of the SF projects (novelty, niche, paradigm, regime) and the prevalent existing EU welfare models. For each row a necessary activity is suggested in accordance with according with the stage and level of the particular country situation.

It is the role of the policy networks organised around SF to understand their own position and situation and to act in order to promote the progression from one step to the next, according to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5.1 - Summary of main activities undertaken at macro, meso or micro level and EU countries</th>
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<td>Welfare models</td>
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<td>Traditional SF</td>
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<td>Novelty</td>
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their internal goals and the external context (models, cultural attitudes, policies…).

Like all similar analytical frameworks, it necessarily oversimplifies the structure of a very complex situation. There are different inter-relationships between different levels of the same priority area, and the priority areas themselves are overlapping rather than discrete entities. Changes at macro level can put pressure on the existing regime at meso level, lead to internal restructuring and offer opportunities for niche developments at micro level. Table 5.1 summarises the main activities that have to be undertaken at different levels and the countries that are already involved.

The role of the existing networks is to reinforce their activities at country/regional level, and to promote the change from novelties to regimes. The main activities are undertaken by networks according to the starting situations, as indicated in the Table. Activities may address the priority areas defined subsequently by undertaking actions needed that are recommended in the innovation strategy for SF. Each network is naturally open to collaboration with other networks operating at country level. The co-operation among different national networks can reinforce exchanges, proposals and actions at EU level.

In the proposed scheme the EU role seems to be invisible. In reality, EU structures can offer substantial support for the processes established at country/regional level. They can also serve to improve the evidence base of SF practices at EU level.

As observed in some national platforms and in the EU platform, the EU rural network can be very useful in supporting country/regional networks, in addition to having the co-ordination mechanisms at EU level that could promote SF across Europe.

SF may become an important element in local quality of life issues in order to improve local services for urban/rural populations. SF can also contribute to a key EU development objective and in the context of the requirement for sustainable development it may offer an opportunity for the concrete application of the EU principle of policy coherence and integration.
5.4 Priority Areas in Social Farming

5.4.1 Elaboration of the priority areas

The priority areas comprise activities of different kinds: research projects, pilot projects (both at farm level and different territorial levels, network supports and training and educational projects). A concrete action programme on each priority area can be formulated and is elaborated below.

Priority area 1: Defining and reinforcing the idea of SF

Short description
Social farming is both an old and new concept when seen as the organisation of different kind of services for less empowered people in the context of a local community. It is also differently organised and recognised in different EU Countries. In some cases SF is still implicitly or informally arranged within family farms in a very traditional way. In other countries it is formally regulated and recognised by different institutions and stakeholders. At EU level it is important to improve the awareness about SF and to facilitate a comparative process of common understanding and sharing about this concept in order to:

- make explicit what is still implicit in some contexts;
- recognise existing SF practices;
- reconnect innovation with the traditional use of agricultural resources in order to improve the efficiency/effectiveness of services in both rural and peri-urban areas.

In order to achieve a clearer understanding about SF it is important to work on the different topics described below.

- Analyze existing practices
Social farming is a bottom-up process that normally starts at local level with the individual projects of farmers, public institutions and social groups (communities, third sector). Due to its origins, social farming follows a learning-by-doing process, thus make local projects quite different from another, with a richness and flexibility in terms of different contexts and service-users involved – but at the same time with a certain fragility. All projects are very demanding in terms of the work and attention necessary to make them successful. The result is that project promoters are fully absorbed by their own activities
and they can pay little attention to other projects and stakeholders. In this respect there is a growing demand for a better understanding of SF in a wider context and for the possibility to meet, share, benchmark and exchange individual learning with other project owners to build a common knowledge and a shared definition of SF. This process can reinforce understanding about the topic and at the same time it can better facilitate and strengthen local experiences. In a weaker institutional framework it can be seen as a support, providing affirmation about the activity carried out by local project owners. In stronger situations, it is normally seen as a way to reinforce and to better differentiate various activities within the sector. At EU level it is normally perceived as a way to better communicate the concept and to involve new actors and institutions around its promotion.

• **Social farming as a concept**

It is difficult and perhaps even useless to try to fully define social farming. More interesting would be to provide evidence of the value of social farming and identify some specific features that characterise such a field. The name itself links together two fields of activities – agriculture and the social sphere of life – suggesting the possibility of providing services and supports to people and communities by the use of resources from agriculture and valorising informal social networks within the local welfare system.

Social farming as a concept links together aspects that are normally never considered within the context of welfare provision. In regard to the competencies used, SF works at the same time with those who have professional and non-professional skills (both in agriculture and in health/care/educational fields). In terms of regulatory models, it adopts many systems such as market-based approaches (for services and products), contracts and ideas about gift and reciprocity. From an organisational point of view it can represent an innovation in the welfare mix by establishing communities of interest among many different public and private stakeholders around the idea of public good provision. With regard to the tools used, it introduces new infrastructures and natural elements into health/care/educational provisions. SF represents a break from the idea of specialism in favour of a more flexible organisation of different activities that can include and address people with different needs in a more flexible and specific way, moving from the idea of client/user to a more inclusive idea of a whole person. It represents a growing opportunity in the organisation of welfare
systems. SF introduces a radical innovation in rural, agriculture and social services. The SF concept needs to be better debated, shared and expanded among public and private stakeholders in order to facilitate its common understanding – and its introduction to those who are unfamiliar with it.

• Identify the specificities of social farming

The concept behind social farming is linked to the use of agricultural/farm resources, the contact with biological cycles (plants and animals), the presence of interactive groups (families/co-ops/communities), the informal relations and the value of exchange and reciprocity, the possibility for less empowered people to share/take part in a normal life, the flexibility of time and space that allows for a more tailor-made environment and the ability to adapt and diversify services according to the needs of specific service-users. Such specificities mean that a large umbrella of services for very different options and users can be provided. A better understanding of the different elements that characterise SF and their beneficial effects should be organised in order to clarify the added value of SF in society.

• Validation and recognition of SF

What is unique in social farming is the presence of a different attitude by farmers in providing a public good as well as the willingness of health/care professionals to engage with agricultural processes. Quite often in SF there is a mix of market and non-market values linked together. Sometimes they are fully and formally recognised by the society by means of direct payments or monetary compensation provided by the health or agricultural sector. In other cases they are recognised by ethical consumers by means of their appreciation of the agricultural product sold.

In a way social farming can be recognised as a social responsibility by farmers towards the wider society. The second aspect that should be underlined is related to the possibility of providing local resources by farmers and agriculture in order to organise social services. Particularly in rural remote areas social farming has the possibility to replace professional social-care systems with more informal systems rooted in the locality and within families in order to re-establish local communities and innovative self-help networks.
Starting from its specific features SF can be validated and recognised in a wider perspective by the relevant public services that should more fully consider its effectiveness for service-users, by local communities that should be able to understand and evaluate its impact on social capital and by local ethical consumers who are willing to pay for products that incorporate such social values.

- **Identify the common grounds and differences at local/territorial level**
  SF should be better understood by collecting information about different projects, analysing their structures, their organisation, the people involved and the results achieved. Gradually, a system of classification regarding different SF projects can emerge. Approaches should be identified to better compare and to easily evaluate the on-going process of SF within the EU.

- **Define codes of practice and a manifesto**
  Some common concepts and values related to SF should be analysed and debated in the community of project holders as well as in the research and institutional communities. The organisation of a specific code of practice or manifesto could be the outcome, which at the same time, could act as an input into an ongoing process of understanding and exchange of ideas about the topic.

- **Connect SF to main political guidelines and strategy papers for social/educational/ health/agricultural sectors**
  SF should be better connected to the main strategic statements related to the fields involved and gradually embedded into the political process. At EU level particularly, key statements on rural development and on social affairs should have a focus on analysing, introducing and linking the SF concept into the process of change. This process could be facilitated by the involvement and recruitment of new actors to the issue, especially those directly involved in planning and preparing strategic statements.

**Sources:** At local level many supports can be found to begin the process in order to animate the building of an arena for debate. Some resources can be found by involving local authorities at different level and sectors.

Other institutions such banks and foundations can also support initiatives at local, national and international levels. Some EU
projects could be combined in order to progress the subject as well as developing the relationships among those involved with these groups (e.g. Leonardo projects and other platforms, observatories on social affairs, Progress; those that require international networks and an EU scale. EU/national rural networks should be briefed in order to introduce SF in the political arena.

Priority area 2: Improving knowledge about SF

Short description
The social farming movement started with high ideals and pioneering projects, each with its own history, development, motives and circle of people sharing ideas, dealing with similar problems and finding solutions to them. So, different types of social farming have developed across Europe. Therefore, development and transfer of knowledge about social farming is important at several levels.

In order to achieve an adequate exchange of knowledge about SF it is important to work on the different topics described below.

- Knowledge for farmers
  Farmers and other initiators can learn from the experiences of colleagues at regional, national and international level. One way of organising learning is through exchange among farmers. This could be done through organised travels and visits to other social farms, conferences on specific issues and discussions about the particular qualities of different cases.

  To foster the professionalisation of social farming it is important to improve education and training about the topic. Until now there have been few courses that focus on strengthening both social and agricultural skills and competencies. Education and training for social farming must be promoted by providing support for existing educational initiatives and the setting up of new ones. The job profile combines skills and qualifications in different disciplines and is supplementary to the traditional job description of the farmer. Education and training measures will secure, improve and develop the quality of social and agricultural services on farms.
• **Linking sectors**

Social farming links the agricultural and social sectors. The observation is that this linkage does not occur naturally. Additional efforts are needed to build strong linkages. This is only possible when there are common goals and perspectives. To reach common perspectives, activities focused on shared goals are necessary.

• **Communication tools**

Communication between the partners involved in social farming and to the wider society is important. The use of various communication tools can be helpful in this respect. Activities directed towards society in general could be: a national and international website focusing on social farming, newsletters, popular magazines, videos and a catchy slogan for social farming. Activities directed towards those partners in social farming could include focus groups and communities of interest. Activities directed towards policy makers and research could be articles in various journals and papers, presentations at symposia and existing networks.

Initiatives in social farming can be supported and access to new sources of funding could happen through joint publicity, publications, a presence on the internet and political representation of their interests.

Regional and national support centres can play an important role in communication. Social farming needs contact points. The creation of a central network and advisory service established within the framework of existing advisory provisions could be a first step in overcoming the lack of transparency within complex system of laws and authorities, officials, networks, funding and initiatives. This co-ordination would not only bring together supply and demand for social services on farms, but would give competent advice on options for further training and funding, thus helping to develop and implement good ideas in the long term. The remit of this institution could also include representing the interests of social farming and informing the public.

• **Research data**

In order to develop SF from a niche experiment to a mainstream position, it is important to connect research with practice. To build evidence about the effectiveness of social farming, it is important that such research fits with the practice on social farms and involves both farmers and users.
In addition, it is crucial to analyse how social farming can develop at local, regional and national levels: what are the hindrances? what are the success factors? As a follow up, developments in different countries can be compared. Important aspects to consider could be the role of initiators, networks, regulations and policy support.

Social farming needs support from research in the fields of therapy, medicine, social work, agriculture and education – none of which can be separated from one another in the actual life and work on the farm. What is learned from real experiences regarding the effectiveness of integrating people in the daily and yearly rhythms on the farm and communal agricultural work needs to be documented and used for the further development of social farming. There needs to be support for the work in caring for nature and the cultural landscape which is made possible on social farms through many helping hands. Interdisciplinary research which disseminates the knowledge gained from experiences, integrates and supervises participating actors from practice, user groups and administration, can foster innovative ideas and involvement in social farming. Scientific support for pilot projects can be a help in developing models based on single enterprises and co-operatives as well as entire model regions.

Sources or support schemes for this theme can be acquired by: products from the SoFar project, The Leonardo da Vinci Program (EU), the EU VII Research Framework, Cost actions, the Progress project, Community of Practice Farming For Health (CoP FFH), national support schemes, Voice EU audit system and existing national relationships with the EU.

**Priority area 3: Building networks on SF**

(nationally and internationally)

**Short description**

Development of a niche sector is successful when a joint ‘sense of urgency’ is felt by all participants involved in the sector; sufficient interactions with end-users occur; a broad network is formed with different types of stakeholders; clear expectations and goals are defined and learning takes place at different levels.

Strong international networks are needed for further professionalising social farming in an international context, for a more intense co-operation between different stakeholders and a
guarantee of long-term continuation of the sector. In these networks, an intense exchange of scientific and applied knowledge is necessary to effect a process of learning and exchange of ideas and experiences. For developing social farming further and gathering the ammunition for political lobbying, more knowledge is needed about different organisational models, financial structures and co-ordination mechanisms as implemented in different countries. There needs to be an intensive exchange of knowledge on effective management models and good agricultural practices between different countries.

Until now, only scientific co-operation has taken place. It is necessary to extend this co-operation towards alliances between social farmers and other stakeholders embedded in the whole chain of the social farming practice and between people working on rural development and landscaping issues. This indicates a need for the set up of (international) exchange programmes between farmers, users, etc. These programmes should encompass both international meetings and the initiation of collective pilots in which exchange of users may play a key role. Arising from this co-operation, these programmes provide more insight into the tasks and challenges on regional, national and international levels and will develop the SF sector further.

In order to build the networks appropriately, it is important to work on the different topics described below.

• **Share activities and needs**

A collective approach is needed with respect to the definition and identity of SF. This requires:

— Joint studies on effectiveness, specific qualities and critical success factors (Cost Actions).
— Addressing the following questions:
  How do we define social farming in a national and European context?
  Which developments are generic and which are region specific?
  What lessons can be learned?
  What level within the EU is suitable for a fruitful debate and decisions on care issues that can be implemented at national and regional level?
  How is social farming in each country related to the characteristics of the health system in each country?
How does small-scale multifunctional farming fit within an EU legislative framework aimed at large-scale highly specialised farming?
How can social farming attach itself to general EU legislation (such as rural development etc.)?
What will reduce the gap between policy-makers and entrepreneurs?
— Active participation in small scale pilots addressing the implementation of quality care systems (by representatives from the social farming sector), choosing Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) as best practice examples.
— The set-up of an international database (and website), accessible to different interested parties and providing different types of information (with different languages), will also contribute to an optimal exchange of knowledge and experience.
— A close connection with the ‘Farming for Health’ network will also support the building of a strong network for green care.

- **Mobilise resources**
  For strengthening the international network the co-operation between different interested parties should be mobilised and encouraged. A joint ‘sense of urgency’ by all parties is required to move towards a collective goal. This means:
  — “Joining-up” interests between different government departments (Ministries of agriculture, welfare, economic affairs and education) and the formulation of joint actions.
  — European political lobbying from the ministries.
  — More tight co-operation with municipalities.
  — Stimulation of joint entrepreneurship.
  — EU funding for new initiatives (e.g. rural development).

- **Organise common actions**
  A concrete action plan and clear engagement within the social agriculture sector can form the basis for the development of SF. Existing GAPs can serve as examples of best practice that can be replicated and implemented within the sector overall. This means:
  — Alliances between people working on rural development and landscape/nature issues.
  — The organisation of meetings for exchange of ideas between farmers, health organisations, policy-makers and scientists.
  — International exchange among users.
— Connection to the ‘Farming for Health’ network is a prerequisite for success.

• **Involvement of new actors**
  More insights are needed on the tasks and challenges at regional, national and international level for further development of the SF sector. This means a careful embedding of SF in the health sector and sufficient financial support. The interest and investment by banks is an important condition for success. New actors who should be involved are service-users’ organisations and banks.

• **Development of service-users’ associations**
  Service-user organisations now only operate at a national level. For building an international network the service-user organisations of different countries should meet and co-operate. At the moment, service-user groups differ between countries. For future co-operation a discussion should be started on themes such as: ‘Who is the service-user?’, ‘What does the service-user exactly want?’, ‘To what extent is service-user emancipation guaranteed?’

  The basis for these discussions might be laid when international exchange among service-users occurs. Then different service-user organisations should become involved in developing this new network.

• **More debate with other sectors**
  Necessary transitions within a sector take place by the interaction of processes, activities and events at different levels. It needs to happen alongside societal trends and developments and needs to be embraced within the fields of policy, culture, science, technology and markets. For social farming this means more close co-operation with:
  — Municipalities
  — Health organisations
  — Other ministries.

*Sources* or support schemes for this theme can be acquired by: the EU rural networks, existing networks (LAGs), the Leonardo da Vinci Program, local resources and CoP FFH.
Priority area 4: Identifying a common judicial framework and shared vision on SF

Short description
As highlighted repeatedly, Social Farming initiatives across Europe are characterised by the heterogeneity of experiences and diversity in terms of different stages and trajectories of development; the focus of the initiatives; their origins; different organisational forms, structures and scale – among others. Another important area in which this heterogeneity is manifest is the regulatory and legal framework in which Social Farming operates at different levels of governance (local/regional, national, supra-national). To a large extent, analysis of this specific priority area is interdependent and indivisible from issues raised in the analysis of other priority areas – specifically questions related to how social farming is defined and recognised, how knowledge systems related to social farming can be improved and better communicated and how national and international networks on social farming can be developed or strengthened.

Before looking at what actions may be taken to progress this priority area, it is useful to identify some significant contextual issues.

• Absence of commonality of approach
As outlined earlier, on the evidence of the SoFar project, the regulatory and legal environment in which Social Farming operates across Europe varies widely. In some countries, it is quite underdeveloped (Ireland, Slovenia) while in others there is a link between specific sectors such as agriculture and health (the personal budget model used in the Netherlands); it may be embedded within the agriculture sector (the “compensatory payments” system adopted in Flanders); it may be linked with the social inclusion/social economy agenda (France, Italy, Germany) or the education sector (France) to a greater or lesser extent.

• The importance of the “local” context
Social farming is a cross-cutting issue spanning a range of sectors including agriculture, rural development, justice, health and social affairs – among others. For all countries, the question of coherence across these various sectors – in terms of how measures and instru-
ments are framed and “joined-up” so as to be mutually reinforcing (rather than contradictory) – is an important one. A complicating factor is the existence of more complex forms of federal/regional or decentralised governance that exist in many EU states. Again, the SoFar evidence suggests that it is the smaller states/regions (such as the Netherlands and Flanders) where regional/national networks are strongest that have been most successful in developing a level of coherence across regulatory and legal systems. By contrast, more complex forms of decentralised governance, such as that which is currently underway in France, have led to greater uncertainty regarding the environment in which Social Farming operates. In the case of Germany, the problems of coherence and co-ordination are amplified by the fact that the country has 16 federal states, many of which have different legal and institutional frameworks across sectors such as agriculture, social services, health and education, among others. In addition, as pointed out elsewhere, regulatory and legal frameworks relevant to Social Farming will be embedded within profoundly differing welfare systems across the EU. Using the typology adopted elsewhere, such welfare regimes range from social democratic models to corporatist models, liberal models and Mediterranean models. What is at issue here is the extent to which the prevailing welfare model shapes the regulatory and legal environment in which social farming operates in different countries. For example, it is argued that in countries where the social democratic welfare model prevails, Social Farming is more likely to be formally regulated within a specific sectoral setting or policy domain – such as healthcare. Under liberal welfare regimes, Social Farming will be seen primarily as an activity for the community/voluntary/charitable sector.

**Ethics, Values and Regulation in Social Farming**

Notwithstanding the diversity of Social Farming experiences across Europe, a shared characteristic is the importance of communities and individuals in driving the engagement and development of initiatives, often heavily influenced by individuals’ and groups’ own beliefs and value systems and built from the bottom-up in a “pioneering” spirit. In fact, one of the recurring themes throughout the SoFar work is how to develop appropriate standards, monitoring and quality systems without negatively impacting on the personal values and commitments which underscore many of these activities. There is a need for regulatory/legal instruments to
provide the requisite degree of support, guidance and clarity for those stakeholders without stifling the innovation, imagination, and creativity which are hallmarks of social farming as it has evolved to date. However, this needs to be balanced against the imperative to safeguard the interests of service-users who are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society.

- **Service-Users in the Regulatory/Legal Framework**

A key challenge is to identify mechanisms by which the needs and rights of service-users remain paramount in the development and implementation of a legal and regulatory framework. This is an important issue for this sector, given that less empowered/marginalised groups and people of low contractual capacity are such key stakeholders. For many of the service-users in social farming, there are real difficulties in trying to influence the regulatory process in “conventional” ways and in communicating their lived experience from their own perspectives in a way that could usefully shape the process. Again, the local/national context is an important factor as the extent to which service-users’ perspectives are incorporated within a rights-based or entitlement framework varies widely across countries.

*Sources* or support schemes for this theme can be acquired by the EU Realignment Plan.

As implied at the outset, many of the actions necessary to improve the regulatory environment must be reinforced by measures proposed to address other priority areas. For example, measures which develop or strengthen national and international networks will generate useful insights and inform how to build appropriate regulatory and legal frameworks. In addition, it can be argued that increasing awareness and recognition of social farming will be a driving force for the need for appropriate regulation. As social farming becomes more visible, regulation provides a way by which recognition can be afforded to providers of social farming but also a means of addressing societal concerns about the rights and entitlements of service-users.
5.5 Innovative strategies

After identifying the priority areas, the new innovative strategies might be formulated as described below.

Priority area 1: Defining and reinforcing the idea of SF

The identification of social farming as a concept moves through a slow process of collective knowledge. This should involve different actors playing an active role in the field as project holders; health/social care operators, farmers, institutional staff and politicians. According with the local/country situation the process could immediately generate a consensus at national as well as local level and gradually enlarge the range of people involved. In order to facilitate the process the organisation of local networks should be facilitated. A network is a place where people can convene, exchange experiences and share information and knowledge, to attract new actors and to begin to codify their tacit knowledge about the phenomenon. At national/EU level the possibility to mainstream the topic exists through the use of institutional channels, reporting activities, workshops, dissemination of best practice and the exchange of knowledge.

Actions to be taken:

- **Macro level**
  - At EU and national level it could be quite difficult to define and to mainstream the idea of SF. However, some action could be taken in order to do it such as contacting/involving European/national parliament representatives of your country/region who are active in the Rural Development committee and/or the Social Affairs committee
  - Organising meetings with the key actors involved in social farming who could collaborate in order to better communicate the concept of social farming (e.g. users’ associations)
  - To organise and communicate a manifesto
  - To build and involve key actors in wider networks
  - To exchange good practice and to introduce the SF concept in a more co-ordinated way.

- **Meso level**
  - Is there already a shared and codified definition for social farming in your country/region?
• Are there initiatives that could be joined-up in order to increase the relevance of the subject?
• Meetings among project holders
• To present local projects to farmers or health/care/educational professionals
• Open meetings and workshops
• To better analyze processes and projects
• To clarify key roles and instruments related to SF and so to validate and recognise practices.

• **Micro level**
• Quite often farmers are already providing services on the farm without any attention. They do not use the term SF and they are not encouraged to publicise the services offered. Have you tried to involve local technical services for farmers (extension agencies, research centres...) in order to try to introduce the subject at farm level?
• To organise some visits of farmers to some local social farms?
• Pilot projects
• Meetings among project holders
• To present local projects to farmers or health/care/educational professionals
• Open meetings and workshops
• Codify and formalise local projects and good practice
• To organise local forums/networks on SF
• To communicate clearly about local projects and the concept of SF.

**Priority area 2: Improving knowledge about SF**

Different types of social farming have developed across Europe. Therefore, development and transfer of knowledge about social farming is important at several levels.

Actions to be taken:

• **Macro level**
• Analysis of factors stimulating or blocking the development of social farming in different countries
• Work on a European Position paper (Manifesto) on social farming
• Publishing existing knowledge and having a presence at relevant conferences.
• **Meso level**
  - Research collaboration between researchers from the social and agricultural sectors and involvement of practitioners; organising joint meetings of experts in the social and agricultural sectors
  - Foster education, courses, relevant conferences
  - Link with projects on rural development, nature trusts etc.

• **Micro level**
  - exchange visits for social farmers
  - open days on social farms with good PR
  - link with projects on rural development.

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**Priority area 3: Building networks on SF**
(nationally and internationally)

To ensure the building of a close international network, the exchange of scientific knowledge, ideas and exchanges among service-users should be facilitated. This needs the involvement of all stakeholders within the whole chain of social farming (i.e. farmers, agricultural and health organisations, financiers, political organisations and scientists). It requires the organisation of international meetings, pilot projects and the set-up of a wide-ranging lobby directed towards new organisations that have to be involved for the further development of SF.

Actions to be taken:

• **Macro level**
  Analysis of and dissemination on the effectiveness, specific qualities and critical success factors of social farming to persuade society of the strength of this approach for public welfare.

• **Meso level**
  Collaboration between farmers, health organisations, policy-makers and scientists from different countries to define and identify the needs and necessary actions for the further development of social farming.

• **Micro level**
  The exchange of knowledge, ideas and practical experiences at farm level and the initiation of new pilots based on Good Agricultural Practice as “best practice” examples.
Priority area 4: Identifying a common judicial framework and shared vision on SF

Social Farming initiatives across Europe are characterised by the heterogeneity of experiences and diversity in terms of different stages and trajectories of development. This heterogeneity is also manifest in the regulatory and legal framework in which Social Farming operates at different levels of governance (local/regional, national, supra-national). Many of the actions necessary to improve the regulatory environment must be reinforced by measures proposed to address other priority areas. As social farming becomes more visible, regulation provides a way by which recognition can be afforded to providers of social farming, but also a means of addressing societal concerns about the rights and entitlements of service-users.

Actions to be taken:

- **Macro level**
  
  - Develop a more comprehensive audit of the variety of “models” used to deliver social farming across Europe. These vary substantially across countries/regions – in terms of extent to which they are agriculture-centred; medical-centred; welfare-centred; market-oriented; public-good oriented etc. This is an essential pre-requisite as different models of social farming clearly require different forms of regulatory and institutional support.
  
  - Demonstrate and communicate to the relevant authorities and institutions how social farming is a legitimate dimension of multifunctional agriculture – to pave the way for its inclusion in rural development regulations and specific instruments – which has already happened at national/regional level in a small number of European countries.
  
  - For the same purpose described above, provide the evidence of the existence and potential of social farming as a vehicle for contributing to the social inclusion/social economy agenda to relevant authorities – in terms of best practice on different models and instruments that have been developed.
  
  - Because of the range of stakeholders involved, Social Farming is an arena in which measures and instruments need to be framed in a “joined-up” way – but it is not unique in that regard. What can be learned from other relevant settings in terms of useful principles for devising and implementing appropriate legal and regulatory interventions?
Meso level

- Identify appropriate “points of entry” where regulation for social farming could be influenced at this level – e.g. via LEADER or other rural development structures, health services, structures to address social inclusion etc. Highlight how relevant regulatory/legal frameworks have been introduced elsewhere.
- In other national/regional settings that require a joined-up response to legal/regulatory issues, how are such instruments devised and implemented? Are there insights or models of good practice that can be drawn up?
- Identify what lessons can be learned from the experience of “like-minded” coalitions/interest groups in terms of influencing the development/operation of the regulatory environment – (e.g. disability movement; conservation/heritage interests, anti-poverty coalitions; community and voluntary sector; various other social movements).
- Identify mechanisms by which the perspective and experience of service-users can inform the design and implementation of regulatory frameworks. Does this happen in other relevant setting (disability/mental health/social inclusion interest groups – for example)? What have been the processes which took place? What has been the outcome?
- How are such interactions framed – a human rights perspective; medical model; social justice etc.? What is the appropriate approach in the national/regional context?

Micro level

- At local level, identify who are the key influencers regarding the regulation of social farming and how can they be engaged with. As above, identify local coalitions of “like-minded” interests who can contribute to the analysis of this issue.
- Can specific participatory processes/techniques be harnessed as a means by which service-users can influence the regulation of their own environment?
- Can you identify locally-based groups and initiatives who would be willing to engage in such work and how/by whom should it be supported?
5.6 Final conclusions

This chapter presents an overview of new proposals based on the outcomes from the national and the EU platforms that have been organised into a common framework. The platforms can be seen a bottom-up process in which the following elements emerged as being valuable in the formation of a strong policy network:

- the strong commitment of most of the people involved in SF;
- the awareness that a bottom-up approach is the right way to scale up the debate around the topic without losing the relevant values inherent in SF practices;
- the opportunity to progressively include additional institutional stakeholders in the discussion and to build awareness about the evidence and the impact of SF across Europe.

For mainstreaming social farming in Europe a Programme of Action was established aimed at:

- An analysis and integration of SF actions at macro, meso and micro levels according to some specific priority areas.
- The mainstreaming of SF in projects and programmes at regional and country levels, in Rural Development policies (RD) as well as their integration into other related policies (Health, Care, Employment, Justice, Education).
- SF capacity building to underpin the Commission’s capacity to mainstream SF issues effectively.

For this Programme of Action, priority areas were formulated based on the most important themes for an EU development agenda, as identified during the discussions at the platforms. For each priority area concrete actions were described and can be summarised as follows:

**PA 1: Defining and reinforcing the idea of SF**

- Analyse existing practices (a common knowledge base underpinning a bottom-up process of definition)
- Social farming as a concept
- Identify the specificities of social farming
- Validation and recognition of SF
- Identify the common grounds and differences at local/territorial level
- Define codes of practice and a manifesto
Connect SF to main political guidelines and strategy papers for social/educational/health/agricultural sectors.

**PA 2: Improving knowledge about SF**  
*(Research & Education, Knowledge transfer, Communication)*

- Knowledge for farmers
- Linking sectors
- Communication tools
- Research data.

**PA 3: Building networks on SF (nationally and internationally)**

- Share activities and needs
- Mobilise resources
- Organise common actions
- Involvement of new actors
- Development of service-users’ associations
- More debate with other sectors.

**PA 4: Identifying a common judicial framework and shared vision on SF**

- Recognise the importance of the “local” context
- Keep ethics and values at the heart of regulation in social farming
- Keep Service-Users’ Rights paramount in the Regulatory/Legal Framework.

Many of the actions necessary to improve the regulatory environment must be reinforced by measures proposed to address other priority areas.

After identification of the priority areas, new innovative strategies could be formulated and implemented at macro, meso or micro level. It was made clear that networking should proceed. Both at national and international level new meetings should be organised to promote the further exchange of ideas, and the development/implementation of the SF concept and best practice. Further cooperation between farmers from different countries is a prerequisite for further development of the sector within Europe.
6. Conclusions

The aim of the SoFar project was to support EU policies related to multifunctional agriculture by exploring a different and unknown area related to social inclusion and social services.

The project methodology involved two main approaches: a qualitative survey devoted to exploring the subject collecting some preliminary information (about cases, stakeholders, institutional frameworks). The second element, based on innovative participatory methodologies involved the organisation of national and EU platforms. Stakeholders were involved in defining the SWOT at country and EU level, identifying strategies, actions and areas to address in order to promote focused policy instruments and initiatives for Social Farming (SF) across Europe.

This way of conducting the SoFar activities was more than an attempt to use alternative or more innovative ways of doing research. Ex-post we can conclude it was the right approach to use in this very specific and un-codified world. It was also the only way to respect the efforts of people who are active in the field, frequently operating in a low-key manner with little public recognition.

As is clear from the foregoing chapters, the process of involving practitioners and institutions in the SoFar activities was not an easy or unproblematic one. However, the difficulties did not arise in attempting to attract people to take part in the survey work or in the platforms. In all cases, the response was enthusiastic. Stakeholders saw the SoFar project as a first attempt to have better insights and understanding into what they were already doing, to benchmark their practices with colleagues in other EU countries, to analyse opportunities and threats and to propose actions.

The EU research framework applied to the SoFar project offered many opportunities such as

- Increasing the knowledge about the topic;
• Building a new arena around a new subject (Social farming) capable of including new actors in policy design;
• Stimulating the opportunity to start to establish a network around SF;
• Opening a space to enable reflection about how to promote a better integration among different institutional levels in order to promote SF;
• Focusing on the opportunity to share competencies and resources at different levels and from different perspective in order to promote SF.

The SoFar project considered itself – and functioned also – as a process more than a project. It established some initial milestones in order to define a pathway of change in SF and in rural areas. Of course, as already debated in Chapter 4, this approach led to some elements of disconnection between the process started within the project and the project itself. Deadlines and project constraints are never useful for a dynamic process.

During the SoFar project/process there was clearly a risk of an instrumental use of the participatory dynamic. At the same participants and researchers were aware of the opportunities presented from the application of this process.

As a tangible result of the SoFar project, stakeholders established new contacts. They developed a greater awareness of the main features of social farming across Europe. They shared this knowledge and put it to work, by discussing future initiatives that would better represent their own activities – not merely as isolated projects but as a more integrated network.

Participants were aware that the SoFar project could represent a starting point for future activities rather than an endpoint. This is also why the main perspective that was debated and agreed during the platforms was related to the organisation of a network capable of continuing the debate and to stimulating change in each country as well as at EU level. They focused the attention on communication as a useful tool to increase the knowledge and the awareness about Social Farming and to try to ease the process of change in regional as well as national and EU policies.

Some more practical project results, such as the manifesto, the priority areas and the innovation strategies represent project
outputs that will be considered in future debate among different stakeholders and diverse initiatives\textsuperscript{16}.

What was also clear to stakeholders involved was that the process of policy formation and policy change is never linear – and more often is circular and iterative. This is clear from the priority areas identified and the actions presented in the innovation strategy.

Because of the different stages of social farming across Europe as well as the different welfare models, it is impossible to define a single model or a specific path. At the same time, various actions can be organised in each region/country and at EU level in order to support the practices, to reinforce the scientific evidence about SF, to better organise the sector, to communicate and to support local initiatives. While SF practices can be diverse and the development trajectories at local level are necessarily different, the pathway of change can be seen as the same all over Europe and need the same types of actions and supports.

This is the idea of the four priority areas:
1. Defining and reinforcing the idea of Social Farming
2. Improving knowledge about SF (involving research & education, Knowledge transfer and communication)
3. Building networks (nationally and internationally)
4. Identifying a common judicial framework and a shared vision on SF.

The innovative strategies operate within the framework of the priority areas with specific action to be taken at different levels. They function as a set of pointers that practitioners all over EU can follow in order to support their own action.

There are some more general remarks that we can reflect on at the conclusion of the SoFar process. They relate mainly to the following five points:
1. the relationships between SF, social policies and Rural Development policies at EU level;
2. the connection between RD policies, social policies and SF;
3. some reflection related to rural innovation;
4. some final remarks regarding policies and public intervention for rural development,

\textsuperscript{16} The manifesto has been already debated during a COST 866 meeting in Thessaloniki, and it will be presented in a public international debate in Modena, as well as in the Community of Practices Farming for Health in Pisa, May 2009. The same track will be followed for priority areas and innovation strategies.
5. the transversal impact of SF on economic, environment and social issues.

**SF, social policies and Rural Development policies at EU level**

Social Farming extends the idea of multifunctional agriculture to the organisation of different kind of services for rural as well as urban dwellers. We can speculate on why, in the EU, a debate about social farming has not taken place to date. As is evident from the practices on the ground, this is not because it is only a theoretical possibility for farmers.

In general, the first factor we can look at regarding this question is the EU approach to rural development. The dominant rural scenario is one which sees rural areas as mainly urban dependent. Rural areas are seen as hinterlands of global/urban nodes (Lennert, 2008) As a consequence policies alternate between a paternalistic cohesion and a competitive paradigm. RD and political interventions promote a local economy based on soft tourism, integrated sectors, commodification of local natural resources and residential spaces. Multifunctional agriculture is seen more as a palliative to the productivist cost-price-squeeze, or as a spatial regulation of the consumption countryside rather than a key component of a sustainable rural development (Marsden & Sonnino, 2008).

In most rural areas, the incoherence of a model focused mostly on economic values has become evident with the erosion of social structure and services (Shucksmith, 2004) normally linked to the presence of collective goods and public resources. Less attention has been given to new redistributive tools associated with sustainable rural areas (Shortall, 2004). Alternatively, sustainable ruralism is strictly connected to the organisation of a life-sustaining web (Barnes, 2008) based on new rules, different attitudes in local communities and a different organisation of pathways of innovation and policies. In that respect social farming could offer a strong contribution to more sustainable development in rural areas, as well as to a better integration of urban demand with peri-urban supply. At the same time, RD policies should better integrate different aspects of sustainability into their approach by augmenting economic and environmental aspects with the social viability of local communities.

This idea immediately leads to a second point, the connection between RD policies, social policies and SF.
RD policies, social policies and SF

As scientists researching on rural development and rural policies we should draw attention to the disconnect between rural and social policies. As already said rural development is mainly focused on the economic and environmental viability of rural areas. Furthermore, in general LEADER actions have mainly been focused on economic and environmental aspects, notwithstanding the fact that some LAGs have also addressed social services. It was believed that each national welfare system could provide enough resources in order to address social issues.

At the same time, the EU political arena for social affairs is less integrated than the agricultural and rural development one. The Lisbon Summit of 2007 included social affairs in the framework of policies in which the EU can act. The intervention of the EU on social matters is based on the so-called “open co-ordination method” that encourages co-operation and exchange among Member States by using and promoting best practices, the organisation of some minimum rules and restrictions and some intervention approved by the Council. Member States define at EU level some common objectives related to social issues that they want to achieve. Each Member State acts according to their national policies but they are also committed to monitor and to evaluate the results achieved by using a common grid and by following common procedures. It is the responsibility of the Member States to define the needs for which basic services and infrastructure and a better support will be needed in their local context. The organisation of local services is dependent on the welfare models adopted in each country and from the internal institutional structure. Due to this institutional framework, each EU country follows specific models. What is evident at EU and at national level is that social issues are addressed primarily based on the specific needs of different categories of citizens – rather than on a territorial basis. This could lead to some problems in the case of rural areas, especially when the main focus is on social needs in urban areas. Social policies are conceptualised differently from development policies. This explains also why it is difficult to introduce the concept of social farming, an activity that links in a particular way two very different sectors, farming/agriculture and social practices.

Rural areas faces specific issues and needs due to particular settlement patterns, infrastructural issues, specific social structures and difficulties in planning underpinned by ideas about scale
economies. In rural areas, the organisation of social services should follow a specific direction more based on scope economy and multi-purpose activities and services. In this field multifunctional agriculture could prove to be a useful tool with which to reinforce the provision of social services in rural areas – but it could also improve the efficacy of social services provided to urban citizens.

In relation to SF, it has already been observed that there is a diversity and diffusion of projects in all EU countries. At the same time, according to the prevailing welfare model, practices are quite differently organised and regulated in each country as analysed previously. However, in every EU country, SF is promoted in order to diversify, to innovate and to improve the efficacy of social services both for urban and rural citizens and for many different target groups.

There are elements of SF that suggest it has a contribution to make to better coherence between RD models and social intervention. In all EU countries the organisation of the welfare system is under pressure to change. At the same time, strong limitations are emerging due to the economic and environmental crises. Responses to the environmental and economic crises demand completely different patterns of development and lifestyles in the EU as well as in other developed countries. Food provision, environmental resources and relational goods are receiving increased consideration in society. In this respect the role of rural areas and of their resources is becoming more important day by day, even with respect to urban contexts.

More and more local systems are being asked to re-think their organisation. They should be able to attract external resources (Castells, 1998) in order to support local communities, but also to better mobilise and valorise internal resources in order to answer to local needs for daily environmental and social needs. With regard to rural development in the immediate future we need deeper reflection on the organisation of vibrant communities based on the triple “pillars” of economic, environmental and social viability – and better integration of these aspects. SF is in keeping with these needs. Multifunctional farms offer simultaneously products, better environmental services and social services.

SF seems to be strongly in accordance with this new scenario. It offers at the same time the possibility to diversify on-farm activities and to diversify family income, to better valorise human resources present on the farm, especially by enhancing the participation of women and young people, to reduce the gap between urban and rural areas regarding the health/care provision and to reinforce social capital.
For these reasons SF should be better understood through the lens of multifunctional agriculture in order to promote innovative patterns of rural development, less dependent on compensation and funding and better rooted in local resources and service provision – these are the hallmarks of a pro-active project of change.

For the same reasons the role of social services in rural development should be better analysed through a rural development lens because of the strong linkages and the implication they have for rural development processes. The OECD has already indicated that service delivery is key to the development of rural regions. In this respect 6 key policy areas to improve service delivery in rural areas were outlined:

1. the supply of services should be designed to match the characteristics needs and assets of different rural regions;
2. equity and efficiency targets should be carefully balanced;
3. innovative rural-urban contracts should guide service delivery;
4. governments should move away from a logic of spending to a logic of investment;
5. effective and inclusive governance is key to rural service delivery;
6. service delivery innovations should be encouraged.

There is a general question here. Is social farming just a useful way to reorganise care services by involving farmers, or does it represent the result of a more radical change where new linkages are created between social and economic organisations in order to reorganise local welfare? A better understanding of SF practices, and the definition and the discussion of best practices, could facilitate the evaluation and diffusion of innovative tools for social and labour inclusion, both in urban and rural areas.

Although SF may be an attractive option to those who may wish to avail of it, it does not represent the only solution for the organisation of suitable services in rural areas. The organisation of the welfare mix in rural areas is a complex subject that can only be solved with appropriate and strong intervention. But it should be observed that SF fits with all of the six points contained in the key message of the OECD Cologne meeting on Innovative Service Delivery (outlined above) and as such, SF is able to play more than a minor role in improving the social networks of rural areas.
Rural innovation

Without any doubt we can consider SF as an innovative pattern of multifunctional agriculture. While we cannot address the issue of rural innovation in detail, there are some specific aspects that should be underlined. First of all, social farming shows that quite often innovative solutions are already present in the countryside and they are almost always the result of an innovative attitude of farmers and small group of local stakeholders. It is also clear that the diffusion of such innovative habits and solutions frequently meets with many constraints. Resilience is a concept that we apply not only to the farmers involved. We can extend this idea to the organisational and institutional framework in agriculture and rural world, and, in the case of social farming, to the other sectors involved.

SF can be considered as a process of innovation in that it fits with the following concepts:

1. Social innovation refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organisations that meet social needs of all kinds and that extend and strengthen civil society.
2. It has a systemic nature – it is the outcome of collective action and depends on the social structure wherein innovators operate.
3. It is the resulting pattern of interaction between people, tools, natural resources more than a transfer of external knowledge.
4. Some features of SF as social innovation
   - locally embedded and bottom-up process of development
   - Public/private goods
   - Different levels: micro, meso, macro
   - Inter-sectoral
   - Inter-disciplinary
   - Bottom-up rather than top down organisation.

So the case of social farming illustrates many issues related to social innovation such as:

- Innovation is locally rooted but is strongly influenced by the driving forces that characterise an historical period (this is why SF has started throughout the EU at the same time).
- Very often new solutions are born from single individuals or small groups of people with specific behaviours who are strongly motivated and willing to share new principles and solutions. This people are able to define, to develop, to improve and to protect new initiatives or “novelties”.
- Such novelties normally occur more frequently when the local
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environment is more open – from a social, political, cultural and economic view – to innovation.

• Such kinds of innovations are socially rooted.
• Novelties can find a fertile environment but this may not always be the case. The passage from a “novelty” to the organisation of a niche of projects, a new paradigm and a different regime, depends on many factors. One of the most important is the presence of people that can mediate and integrate the new solution in a broader context and reduce the resistance in the local environment (Becattini, 1991, calls these figures versatile integrators).
• In that respect the presence of a pilot project that is well defined, monitored, evaluated and communicated can facilitate the activity of the versatile integrators.
• A strong pilot project may feed more than one purpose. It can be understood and analysed by institutions and politicians (in the agricultural as well as in the social sector in case of SF), it can be easily presented to other practitioners and it can be communicated to civil society.
• Only when an innovative solution is consolidated can policies can start to consider it as a new field of intervention. It has to be consolidated in order to reduce the risk of political failure and the negative involvement of policy makers.
• This means that for a long period project holders alone are the only ones responsible for the life of the new initiative. In time, when they succeed in enlarging their audience they should be able to let “newcomers” (other practitioners, institutions, civil society, politicians) re-interpret the practice according to their own ideas and needs. Of course this is a negotiated process that can lead to a different vision emerging.
• A more institutionalised idea of the innovation may develop after this process of negotiation, socialisation and change.
• The definition of a set of rules depends on many different aspects as the diversity of SF across Europe already shows.

Rural development policies

Rural innovation is a social process of change. Rural development policies should take this into consideration and act accordingly. In order to facilitate rural innovation a fertile environment for novel solutions should be promoted. LEADER programmes have followed this path by trying to promote organisational innovation
from an institutional point of view and to stimulate local capacity to promote coherent strategies, actions and solutions.

As social farming teaches us, there are still some aspects that should be better focused in rural innovation. These include the capability to build some strategic incubators for innovative action, building political tools to make it easier for novel projects to be supported and to have the opportunity to consolidate and to develop.

The development of social farming across Europe is strongly linked to some key aspects such as:

1. Each policy is located within an institutional framework with clear values, knowledge, goals
2. Political change has to acknowledge issues of policy legacy/inheritance (policy acting as a filter for change, resistant groups, national and local differences)
3. The process of change can be referred to as:
   - horizontal policy integration (among sectors: agriculture, environment, welfare). It seeks:
     i. new actors in the arena
     ii. the organisation of policy networks
     iii. new attitudes and mutual learning
   - vertical policy integration (from government to multi-level governance). It requires a demand for:
     iv. public-private integration: new rules and procedures
     v. an attitude to share resources and knowledge.

Typically, rural policies are able to promote “solutions to problems” that are already well established and consolidated in the field. Only these kinds of approaches can be supported by the main institutional and political environment without any loss of credibility at local level. However, the reality about the most innovative of solutions is that they are often built by local farmers and by small groups of stakeholders. They can also stay “in the shadow” for a long time without any attention from the wider public.

In order to support such a cluster of novelties, it could be strategic to organise a “low-key” minimalist package of “tools” for support. This package (supports for local meetings, some instruments for communication, some training activity organised at local level) should support local initiatives to increase their profile and to better represent/communicate their activities “externally”. Such small groups of initiatives could be strongly consolidated with a small amount of resources but could have a high impact on rural innovation processes.
How could such objectives be achieved by EU policies? An opportunity could arise by linking a *scoping activity* driven by research exploring such activities with some *specific supports* introduced within ordinary regulations that have a focus on emerging rural activities. The EU level and the national, regional and institutional processes should be better integrated, not only from the point of view of procedures, but also by considering how to build common objectives and strategies and to achieve common results.

Governance means responsibility and subsidiarity. Bottom-up and top-down activities should be better co-ordinated with each other. “Scoping” research could identify from the bottom-up very innovative pathways of change (such as the case of SF). It is for the EU institutions to better understand the value and the relevance of such evidence on multifunctional agriculture in order to achieve a more sustainable ruralism (Shucksmith *et al.*, 2007). In order to facilitate the diffusion of social farming practices in the ground two possible strategies can be designed:

- To try to reinforce within the institutional communication structures, the existence of such practices in order to reinforce the position of local project stakeholders in the local arena;
- To start from the experience gained within the SoFar project to introduce new instruments in a policy for rural innovation that can better link research activities, EU tools and instruments, rural policies, national and regional decisions and local actions.

The experience of the SoFar project supports the second hypothesis. There will always be a small risk arising from proposing solutions that may not be useful or could be redundant. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, at the same time, there could be the opportunity to promote more and more possibilities capable of supporting a long run sustainable countryside in Europe. In an uncertain world, such redundancy could be an exit strategy that would enable the selection of better solutions.

**Transversal issues**

We have stressed throughout the exploratory and tentative nature of our investigations within the SoFar project and the importance of the specific local context. At the same time, the multiple dimensions of the SoFar work – national/regional State of the Art
Reports and case studies; national, regional and EU-level platforms – provide useful insights into some cross-cutting themes and highlight issues that warrant further examination. – some of which have already been touched upon the in the earlier “transversal” analysis of the SoFar Work (see Chapter 3). Useful avenues to explore might be how social farming can contribute to specific dimensions of multifunctionality such as landscape quality or environmental conservation. For example, insights from the SoFar work highlight the prevalence of organic and “low-input” production systems and the importance of landscape/conservation measures in social farming initiatives across Europe, suggesting that social farming may be a promising “vehicle” through which to contribute to the environmental dimensions of multifunctionality.

Turning to issues of social inclusion, there is evidence that social farming practices are addressing key elements of inclusive development. By its nature, social farming demands collaboration and networking between stakeholders from very different strata of society; initiatives are frequently embedded within a community-based/led development framework and are underpinned by a strong credo of social justice, rights and entitlement. For the service-users, empowerment happens through social farming via better social interaction, more numerous and diversified social contacts, better social skills and engagement in meaningful and productive activities. Some of the key future questions for research and practice in social farming relate to how less-empowered and marginalised groups can bring their lived experience and insights to bear on these processes and what participatory mechanisms can be developed and disseminated to ensure that this happens.

On a related issue, evidence from the SoFar analysis suggests that social farming may offer enhanced job opportunities for young people and women. However, we have also seen that many issues of gender equality that arise in related sectors (such as the care sector and agriculture) may also be issues for consideration as the area of social farming develops. These include the feminisation of the workforce; the visibility of the labour force, the commodification of care and issues of professional status, recognition and representation. Within the SoFar work, the desire to receive recognition and the ability to influence policy/decision-making processes have emerged as central challenges for all those who engage in it. However, from a gender perspective, what may be worth exploring is
whether such challenges are likely to be experienced differentially by both men and women engaged with social farming (either as service-users or as service-providers) – i.e. to what extent the concept of “double disadvantage” is a relevant one.

It is clear from the analysis of social farming within SoFar that it has the potential to add value to multifunctional agriculture by creating new opportunities to broaden and diversify farm-based activities and generating new sources of income for farmers. However, our analysis also suggests that understanding the economic dimension of social farming requires a very nuanced approach and a deeper understanding of the relationship between ethics, values, economics and entrepreneurship in SF. Within the SoFar analysis, the attitudes held and positions taken on these matters vary considerably, evidenced by the diversity in practices ranging from those underpinned by a credo of volunteerism or philanthropy; the concept of compensatory payments to farms; contractual arrangements with institutional partners for service-provision and the development of market opportunities/economic relations that are linked to issues of ethical consumption and reputation.

Concluding Remarks

As outlined already, the overall aims of the SoFar project were to support the building of a new institutional environment for social farming; to provide a linkage between research and practitioners/rural actors; to bring different European experiences closer together to facilitate exchange of experiences and activities and to contribute to the design and development of policies relevant to social farming at regional and European level. Reflecting the different stages and trajectories of development in social farming across the various countries/regions, the project served, in some cases, as the first opportunity for those engaged to understand and reflect on experiences in other regions, while simultaneously serving as an avenue for enhanced networking and advocacy in those situations where SF is more established. A particular feature of this project was a methodological approach that was strongly rooted in participatory mechanisms. This approach contributed to generating a sense of empowerment among rural actors and offered also a new model of developing (scientific) support to policy-making, more closely aligned to the idea of ‘interactive policy making’.
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Supporting policies for Social Farming in Europe
Progressing Multifunctionality in Responsive Rural Areas

So Far (acronym standing for “social farming”; complete project title: social services in multifunctional farms) is a Specific Support Action funded by the EU VI Framework programme for research and innovation.

The SOFAR Consortium consists of researchers from Germany (Forschungsinstut für Biologischen Landbau Research Institute of Organic Agriculture); the Netherlands (Plant Research International, Wageningen University and Research Centre); Belgium (Flemish Support Centre for Green Care, University of Ghent); France: IASP Decision, Sisemis/University of Liege, Ireland National University of Ireland, Dublin and Italy (ARSIA and the University of Pisa). The co-ordinator is Professor Francesco Di Iacovo (Dipartimento di Produzione Animale, University of Pisa, Italy).

“Social farming” (or ‘care farming’ or ‘green care’) is a term used to describe a wide range of diverse farming practices aimed at promoting disadvantaged people’s rehabilitation or care and/or contributing towards the integration of people with low contractual capacity i.e: people with physical or intellectual disabilities, convicts, people recovering from alcohol/drug/substance abuse, young people at risk, migrants. Social farming represents a new chance to broaden the scope of European rural development – to diversify farming/rural activities and enhance the role of renewed agriculture in society.

The overall aim of the SoFar project is to support the building of a new institutional environment for social farming by linking research to practitioners/rural players; by bringing diverse European experiences together to enable exchanges and comparisons of experiences to take place and by bringing together key stakeholders in social farming and rural development who can support the design of future policies at regional and European level. The book with the included video presents the main results from the SoFar project.